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Official Records

President: Mr. Kerim (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 132 (continued)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/62/657/Add.5 and 6)

The Acting President: Before turning to the item on our agenda, I would like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/62/657/Add.5 and 6, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/62/657 and Add.1 to 4, Dominica and Paraguay have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in these documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 46

Global road safety crisis

Note by the Secretary-General (A/62/257)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.43)

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Oman to introduce draft resolution A/62/L.43.

Mr. Al-Hinal (Oman): Five years ago, during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, I stood before this Assembly to introduce resolution 57/309 on the global road safety crisis. It was a very modest resolution; all it asked was a report on the global road safety crisis from the Secretary-General for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We have come a long way since then. The Assembly had its first-ever debate on road safety at its fifty-eighth session, and Members were unanimous in emphasizing that road traffic injuries posed a global public health crisis that required urgent action at the national and international levels.

A major development, which took place in April 2004, was the launching of the "World report on road traffic injury prevention" by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank. The report served as both an advocacy tool and a technical document, containing six major recommendations on what countries can do to address the problem of road traffic injuries. Also at the fifty-eighth session, the Assembly recognized the need for the United Nations system to support efforts to address the global road safety crisis, and it invited WHO, working in close cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions, to act as coordinator on road safety issues within the United Nations system.

I thank the Secretary-General for transmitting to us the report contained in document A/62/257 on improving global road safety, prepared by WHO and the regional commissions and other partners of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. I would

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like to thank members of the Collaboration, under the able guidance of WHO, who have contributed so much to the contents of the report.

The report provides an update on the status of the implementation of the recommendations made in resolution 60/5 on improving global road safety. It describes how efforts made at the international level have served to increase awareness about road safety. It proposes a number of recommendations for consideration by the Assembly that would facilitate the implementation of effective interventions known to improve road safety at the national level.

In April 2007, WHO and the United Nations regional commissions organized the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week to serve as a platform for global, regional and national activities to raise awareness about road safety issues. The Week also focused on young road users, highlighting the risks for children and young people. The World Youth Assembly for Road Safety was the key global event of the Week, which brought together over 400 young people from 100 countries to share experiences and create a global network of young road safety advocates. The young delegates developed and adopted a declaration, called the Youth Declaration for Road Safety. Also held during the Week was the second Stakeholders' Forum for Global Road Safety, organized by the Global Road Safety Forum, which brought together participants from Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

I would be remiss if I did not compliment the United Nations regional commissions and their subsidiary bodies for increasing their road safety activities and advocating for increased political commitment to road safety.

The Economic Commission for Europe continues to advocate global action in the elaboration of safety-related global technical vehicle regulations and amendments to the Convention on Road Traffic and the Convention on Road Signs and Signals.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific held a Ministerial Conference on Transport in Busan, Republic of Korea, and adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific.

The Economic Commission for Africa and WHO jointly organized an African road safety conference in

Accra, during which the delegates adopted a declaration that committed ministers to working together to stop the growing epidemic of death and injuries on African roads.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean held its first Latin American and Caribbean Road Safety Stakeholders Forum in San José in 2006. Participants there adopted the Declaration of San José.

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and WHO jointly organized a regional training course for ministry of health officials in Cairo in 2006.

Elsewhere, the Commission for Global Road Safety, under the able leadership of Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, issued the landmark Make Roads Safe report, which included a proposal for the holding of a ministerial conference on road safety. The Make Roads Safe report frames road safety as an issue in sustainable development and clearly illustrates the direct link between safe roads and the effective delivery of many of the Millennium Development Goals. It also highlights the need for road infrastructure development projects, backed by the G8, to include a viable road safety component.

But, despite that progress, there is a growing gap between the developed countries and developing and transitional countries, where the problem is, unfortunately, getting worse. If we cannot accelerate our response to the epidemic of road traffic deaths in low- and middle-income countries by mobilizing more effective enforcement, building safer roadways, changing road user behaviours and providing better care, we will lose tens of millions of lives before those problems turn the corner and start on a downward curve. Therefore, we need a number of sustained and coordinated global initiatives to help close that gap. Just as a rising tide lifts all boats, those initiatives can move us forward on all fronts together.

One of the areas in which substantial progress has been made is the development of the first funding mechanism designed to support capacity-building and provide technical support for road safety at the global, regional and country levels. I commend the World Bank on its initiative to establish the Global Road Safety Facility, a funding mechanism that would support the implementation of the recommendations contained in the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury*

Prevention. I thank the Governments of Australia, the Netherlands and Sweden and the FIA Foundation for their financial support to the Facility.

Here, I would like to point to the steps implemented by the Government of Oman at the national level. Those include the enactment of legislation, the establishment of a national road safety agency, updating comprehensive regulations to meet the needs of the injured and their rehabilitation, and the creation of a registry to obtain detailed information on the consequences of injuries with the aim of minimizing the crisis and with the ultimate goal of creating for our citizens an environment that is conducive to achieving further social and economic development. The Royal Oman Police has organized and participated in a number of events in its continuing efforts to raise greater awareness of road safety issues. It has participated in both the Gulf Cooperation Council Road Safety Week and in the Arab Road Safety Week.

The Directorate-General for Traffic of the Royal Oman Police established in 2006 the Road Safety Institute, whose mission is to train traffic officers. The Institute conducts a number of training programmes for driving instructors, taxi drivers and public transportation drivers. It also conducts programmes on first aid, administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation and defensive driving. The Institute has organized 18 conferences and events relating to road safety, and two regional conferences were held at the Institute in 2006.

To ensure the safety of drivers and pedestrians alike, the Royal Oman Police is sparing no effort in making sure that traffic regulations are complied with. As speed is the major cause of road crashes, resulting in 53 per cent of crashes in Oman, the Royal Oman Police has installed high-quality fixed-speed radars on all lit dual carriageways, and mobile speed radars have been provided to all police departments in the provinces and regions of Oman. Since the installation of the speed radars, there has been a significant decrease in the rate of speed violations.

The Royal Oman Police is also concerned about the road worthiness of vehicles and has established vehicle technical inspection stations in all the regions of Oman. Those stations are equipped with the most modern technology and systems used in vehicle inspections.

With the increase in the number of vehicles and road users, it is important that rules and regulations be kept in line with accelerating developments in all aspects of life. Traffic laws have been amended to address new and unfamiliar patterns of traffic behaviour.

On behalf of the sponsors — Albania, Argentina, Austria, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Greece, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, the Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen and Oman — I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/62/L.43, on which my delegation held a number of consultation meetings with other Member States in order to arrive at a consensus.

The draft builds on the practical recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/62/257. In its preambular part, the draft resolution underlines the importance for Member States to continue using the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention* as a framework for road safety efforts. It commends the World Health Organization (WHO) for its role in implementing the mandate conferred upon it by the General Assembly to coordinate road safety issues within the United Nations system. It recognizes the important contribution of the United Nations regional commissions in helping the WHO to carry out its mandate. It commends the World Bank for its initiative in establishing the Global Road Safety Facility, expresses concern at the continued increase in road traffic fatalities and injuries, and reaffirms the need for further strengthening of international cooperation.

The time has come for our ministers and other Government officials with responsibilities for transport, health, education, safety and law enforcement to meet to discuss this issue and consider the progress made so far and what remains to be done. Operative paragraph 7 welcomes the offer of the Government of the Russian Federation to host the first ministerial conference on road safety, to be held in 2009. We hope that that important event will bring together ministers responsible for transport, health,

education and law enforcement to exchange views and discuss progress in implementing the recommendations of the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention* and General Assembly resolutions on improving global road safety.

Here, I would like to offer my thanks and gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation for its generous offer and for the leading role it is playing in raising awareness of the road safety issue.

Since the issuance of the draft resolution, the following additional countries have joined the list of sponsors: Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Djibouti, Fiji, Finland, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Monaco, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the delegation of the Russian Federation and the representatives who participated in the many informal meetings we held and who offered constructive suggestions, amendments, advice and support. To all of them, I offer many, many thanks.

I am honoured to recommend draft resolution A/62/L.43 for adoption by the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, Mr. Victor Kiryanov, Chief State Inspector of Traffic Safety.

Mr. Kiryanov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): The Russian Federation, along with a number of other countries, has submitted to the sixty-second session of the General Assembly a draft resolution entitled "Improving global road safety" (A/62/L.43). We hope that it will enjoy the Assembly's support, because the issue of road safety is now more important than ever and requires our constant attention.

Interaction in the field of road traffic safety has lately become a priority area of international cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels and is becoming an important item on the agendas of the United Nations and other international organizations. That is due to the growing use of vehicles throughout

the world and, as a result, an increase in the number of road accidents.

United Nations data shows that each year nearly 1.2 million people die and millions are injured or disabled as a result of road accidents. Besides economic and social costs for individuals and their families, road traffic injuries place an onerous burden on public health-care services. Each year, the costs associated with road traffic injuries in the world amount to hundreds of billions of dollars, and they continue to increase.

Reducing the number of road traffic injuries is one of the necessary preconditions for successful socio-economic development, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, ultimately, for ordinary people to feel safe and secure when travelling by road, and that concerns all road users — both drivers and pedestrians.

This problem is extremely urgent for the Russian Federation. The road safety situation remains difficult in our country. A high accident rate is in many respects caused by the constantly growing mobility of the population, with a shift from public to private transportation and a growing disproportion between a rise in the number of automobiles and the development of the street and road network. This situation leads to worsening traffic and environmental conditions, congestion, an increase in fuel consumption and growth in the number of road accidents.

In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2007, the President of the Russian Federation presented the issue of ensuring road safety as a priority development goal for our country. The Government of the Russian Federation has adopted a special programme entitled "Improved Road Safety for 2006-2012". In our country as a whole, activities in this area have been intensified. All regions of Russia have adopted appropriate programmes on road safety. Their financing has also been increased.

The Russian Federation has traditionally been an active participant in multilateral efforts in the field of road safety. We were among those who initiated regular consideration of the topic of overcoming the global road safety crisis at the General Assembly of the United Nations. In particular, Russia was the first to inform the international community about the implementation measures of the relevant resolution of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The international community highly commended the efforts of the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety of the Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe. Since March 2006, that working party has been headed by a representative from Russia. The role of this body of the United Nations system as an effective tool of international legal regulation in this area was stressed welcomed in resolution 60/5 (A/Res/60/5, para. 6).

We took an active part at both the international and national levels in the preparation and holding of the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week, which focused on young road users. The Russian Automobile Federation became a member of the Global Road Safety Partnership, the major conference of which also took place in Moscow recently.

In 2006, Lord Robertson, Chairman of the Commission for Global Road Safety, whose active work to raise public awareness of the issue of preventing road accidents in the world merits great respect and our full support, proposed holding the first international conference on road safety. It is planned to focus this event on a comprehensive discussion of the road safety situation throughout the world and its influence on socio-economic development and countries' implementation and attainment of the MDGs. In particular, it is planned to review the progress of countries' implementation of the recommendations of the World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention and also to determine ways to step up international cooperation.

The Russian Federation has decided to present an initiative to hold the first global high-level conference on road safety in 2009 in Moscow, together with other actors interested in international cooperation in the area of road safety. The draft resolution being considered today refers to this and other initiatives.

For my part, as someone responsible for ensuring road safety in Russia, I would like to stress our determination to make vigorous efforts to improve the situation in this area and to assist in the strengthening of international cooperation everywhere, to ensure sharing of experience and knowledge, coordination of joint work, elaboration of common rules and standards, and finally, improving the level of the road safety and the quality of life for all road users.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica, Her Excellency,

Mrs. Karla González, Minister of Public Works and Transportation.

Mrs. González (Costa Rica): I want to thank the Assembly for the privilege of addressing this sixty-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Roads are a big part of my responsibilities in the Ministry of Transport. The daily life of each person depends on the roads — to get to school, to work or to the health centre; to facilitate business, agriculture and trade; and to provide the jobs that can lead people out of poverty.

In developing countries like Costa Rica, even simple journeys are hazards. Half of the people killed or badly hurt in road crashes are simply walking. One in ten is killed on bicycles. The death rate of people simply riding in vehicles is also high. Overall, a Costa Rican is more than three times likely to die in a sudden violent road crash than a Northern European. This state of affairs is unacceptable.

Costa Rica is well known for non-violence. We abolished our army 50 years ago. Our president, Óscar Arias, won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in bringing conflicts to a close in our region. He now sees that ending the violence on our roads would be an even greater prize. So he is using his international standing to mobilize action against the violence of road crashes in Latin America.

In Costa Rica, we look for good international advice. We are acting to tackle the key risk factors in road crashes — poorly designed roadways, failure to use safety belts and helmets, drunk driving and excessive speed. Costa Rica believes deeply in constitutional rights and individual freedom. In the past, some had argued that an individual had the right to decide if he or she wanted to protect himself or herself by using a seat belt and that the law should not interfere with such rights. In 2003, we as Governments decided that civil society had elected us to represent and protect its rights. It was time for us to protect ourselves from our worst enemy — our freedom to decide not to protect ourselves. We fought, argued and persuaded. We changed the law on seat belt use and we brought the work of the police and road safety education together. We created a campaign that spoke to our people in a language that they could understand, saying: "For the sake of the people you love, and for those who love you, wear a seat belt."

The forces of the new law and emotion worked together. The rate of seat belt usage rose from around 20 per cent to over 80 per cent — better than the rates in the United States and many European countries at that time. The automobile death rate fell by about 30 per cent. It was, and is, extremely important to realize that we have the tools and ability to reduce these death rates. If we try hard, we can do it.

We were grateful for the help from the international community, especially from the FIA Foundation for the Automobile and Society. We are pleased that our success is being repeated elsewhere.

The Government of President Arias is now tackling another major issue, our roads. Our roads are in bad condition. The same rain that lures tourists to visit the beautiful wildlife and rain forests of Costa Rica is the same rainwater that washes away our roads. For the past 10 years, our roads have been neglected in terms of investment and maintenance. The national budget for roads has been meagre. That has been changing in recent years. For the first time, the Government has decided to dedicate all the resources provided by our fuel-tax law to maintaining our roads. Nevertheless, the damage was so extensive that we could spend the entire budget just patching and painting the roads.

It must be difficult for those in developed countries to imagine the problems that our engineers face. In well-run developed countries, professionals debate various tactics to achieve the lowest whole-life cost of road treatment over the next 20 or 40 years. In Costa Rica, we have more than 30,000 kilometres of roads. We struggle to find the money to keep them in good condition and to build new ones. It is very hard to run a programme to improve the situation, when money is scarce and the road network is so big. Unfortunately, we believe that scenario is the same in most developing countries. But despite our circumstances, we have to change the priorities.

When thinking about road safety, behaviour is key. But there is another key, which depends only upon Governments and decision-makers, namely, infrastructure. If Governments have the money to build new roads, they certainly must take care of the safety component. It is no longer acceptable to spend scarce money to build bigger or longer roads, if we are not also investing money to make our roads safer.

We have a vision, and we are looking ahead, anticipating the needs for the next two decades. Global health equity means that people everywhere — in rich countries and poor ones — have access to vaccines. Global road safety equity means that people everywhere have access not to roads, as we used to believe, but to safe roads, as we believe today.

On 8 May 2006, as the first decision of the new Arias Government, the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, under my command, decreed that we would evaluate our roads, both old and new, in terms of safety. In the past, when we spent money improving roads, we often increased casualties. Speeds rose but the roads were not safely designed. International institutions were short-sighted as well. Too many believed that tackling health, education and poverty could be done, while cutting back on basics.

Now everyone recognizes that we need safe, clean and affordable transport. We need maintenance budgets that are sustainable. We need budgets that will let us surface roads to keep water out today, and not spend 10 times more in major reconstruction tomorrow. We need simple and affordable safety features, which would be expected in a developed country, such as footpaths and safe crossing points, traffic management in villages, safety fencing, safe road and junction layouts, bike paths and uphill lanes. We know that roundabouts and centre and side barriers can reduce traffic fatalities by 90 per cent. Those interventions are as effective as any medicine. They can be our road safety vaccines.

Last year, Costa Rica won a place in the International Road Assessment Programme (IRAP). Costa Rica is one of a handful of developing countries worldwide whose roads were inspected as part of a pilot programme. Working with my Ministry, the road assessment team identified about 2,800 kilometres of road where deaths and serious injuries are concentrated. They then inspected those roads to determine what could be fixed quickly and affordably. Right now, we are studying IRAP's report and recommendations on the roads most in need of safety treatment, if money can be found.

The IRAP report for Costa Rica does more than suggest where thousands and thousands of deaths and serious injuries could be prevented over the years ahead by simple measures such as foot paths, safe crossing points and safety barriers. As a road safety

minister, I am quite convinced that common sense measures based on the systematic measurement of problems are what is needed. However, the report goes on to give the figures that finance ministers and development banks need. Countries such as Costa Rica lose about 2 to 3 per cent of gross domestic product to road crashes. The report shows how treating the roads where serious crashes are concentrated can provide an economic payback of 10 times the money invested. I am therefore pleased that road assessment is recognized in today's draft resolution.

Infrastructure is part of the safety system where Governments have the greatest ability to save lives and prevent injuries. On the other hand, it is also the most expensive part, the part where major investments are required. Let me therefore conclude with a question. Assuming the political will exists to take action, are we going to be able to find the international financing community ready to take those actions and become part of the solution?

With adequate support from developed nations, the World Bank's Global Road Safety Facility — which is also referred to in the historic draft resolution before us today — has the potential to transform this epidemic and provide road safety for everyone. I suspect that many countries are in the same position as Costa Rica. With investment from the international community, there is much we can do for many.

On behalf of my country and all the developing countries of our region, I am here to attest that we have learned from our mistakes. We think that we now know the way. We have decided to tear down all political barriers and obstacles, the mental schemes that have prevented us from changing. We will fight and we will prevail. If we can find the funding, we are ready to take action.

(spoke in Spanish)

If we want to make significant progress in regard to violence in our countries, we need to start with our roads.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Honourable Michael Henry, Minister of Transport and Works of Jamaica.

Mr. Henry (Jamaica): Permit me to convey greetings from our Prime Minister, the Honourable Bruce Golding, who was invited to address the

Assembly. He is unavoidably absent due to prior commitments.

Allow me also, at the outset, to express my appreciation of the privilege of addressing the General Assembly at its sixty-second session in my capacity as Minister with portfolio responsibility for transport on a matter that we consider to be of significant national importance.

The Jamaican delegation welcomes the report transmitted in document A/62/257, prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in consultation with the regional commissions and other partners of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. Our support for draft resolution A/62/L.43 is reflected in our sponsorship of the text and is a signal of our desire that global road safety issues be addressed, with a further strengthening of international cooperation and taking into account the needs of developing countries.

In Jamaica, the issue of road safety is given priority attention on our national agenda. The Prime Minister assumes the lead role as Chair of the National Road Safety Council, a body with overarching responsibilities for road safety matters in the country. That in itself demonstrates the seriousness of my Government's commitment to bring attention to this issue at the highest level. In this arrangement, the Government, the private sector and academia collaborate for the singular purpose of establishing measures to enhance road safety. We are convinced that without this political will, the problem will only be exacerbated and spiral out of control.

This multisector approach has reduced our fatality rate from road traffic injuries from a high of 17.8 per 100,000 of the population to a low of 11.4 per 100,000 in 1999, a situation which at that time compared favourably with many developed countries. Unfortunately, our fatality rate has again climbed to unacceptable levels, peaking at 15.6 per 100,000 in 2002. With a concerted effort, there was a further reduction to 12.1 in 2005.

Jamaica is of the view that stopping this epidemic will take more than any one country can grapple with. Thus, at the regional level, we participate fully in the Latin American and Caribbean Road Safety Forum, which is sustained by the Global Road Safety Forum, a non-governmental agency committed to advocacy and collaboration. The Latin American and Caribbean Forum brings together government representatives

from the transportation, health, law enforcement and education sectors, while mobilizing relevant regional and international organizations with a view to greater collaboration and efforts to curtail — if not eliminate — the epidemic of death on our respective roadways.

Under the leadership of Costa Rica, the Forum is now in the final stages of developing a charter that upon adoption will serve as a signpost — pun intended — for the guidance of the regional committee to fulfil its mandate within the framework of wider collaboration and cooperation to make roads safer for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to WHO, more than 85 per cent of road traffic injuries occur in low- and middle-income countries, a fact that we cannot ignore. One notable consequence of this epidemic is what I would like to describe as a stifling effect that imposes a huge economic burden on developing countries and economies, particularly small and vulnerable economies such as that of Jamaica, where it accounts for 1 to 2 per cent of the gross domestic product. This figure, according to WHO, is compiled with a total bilateral overseas aid contributed by the industrial countries. We are reliably informed by those who carry out research on the burden of road traffic injuries that this staggering effect on GDP represents only half of the story; as that figure only represents lost productivity.

As part of the new political Administration in Jamaica, which is busy with the task of constructing our first budget, we are painfully aware of the additional burden caused by the social and economic costs of the epidemic, especially the negative effects on the health sector. In many low- and middle-income countries, road traffic injuries account for half of the hospital-bed occupants of surgical wards. In such scenarios, the most affected are usually the poorer groups within the society, including many whose historical claims for just compensation are yet to be addressed.

The plight of children in all of this deeply affects me. Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child articulates, *inter alia*, that children have the right to life and that Governments should ensure that children survive and develop in a healthy manner. The data are particularly startling, as they indicate that this right, especially in low- and middle-income countries, is constantly under siege. For our

youth aged 10 to 24 years, road traffic injuries have become the number-one cause of death. Daily, 1,049 of our youth die from injuries sustained on the world's roads network. That means that, worldwide, every one to three minutes, a child perishes from a road accident.

If indeed Governments are to ensure that children survive and develop healthily, leaders must admit that road traffic injuries are seriously challenging their ability to deliver on this essential right of the child. They must take the bold steps necessary to confront their lethal impact on our societies.

When set against the background of struggling economies, record-high oil prices and the subsequent upsurge in food costs, the effects on the poor and needy present a major challenge for many Governments across the world. The plight of the poor becomes even more complicated, because those who are unable to afford automobiles are the most vulnerable on the roadways, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Thus in Jamaica, we have a situation in which, consistently for that last 20 years, pedestrians account for 33 per cent of all road fatalities. The larger category of vulnerable road users — pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists — accounts for 66 per cent of fatalities. In many countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, pedestrians account for as much as 50 per cent of road fatalities. The very limited funding available does not allow the privilege to adequately plan for the road users at that level.

What makes this carnage on our roads even more challenging is that the lower and middle-income countries, which are least equipped to deal with this crisis, account for 90 per cent of road traffic injuries. That presents a serious impediment to our efforts to achieve sustainable development and has a negative impact on our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Preliminary estimates indicate that Jamaica's accident emergency costs amounted to \$14 million in 2006. That represented 0.48 per cent of our gross domestic product; 7.2 per cent of the budget allocated to hospitals; and 0.33 per cent of our national budget. That is an economic drain, in our situation, in which scarce resources would be better spent in areas of development. We need to actively seek to spend those dollars on preventative interventions, where they are an investment rather than an expense.

Of significant note too, is that this modern day plague is almost invisible. It is, indeed, very tragic, as it silently undermines the overall quality of life, and that silence must be broken.

I close this presentation with three recommendations. The first one has emerged from the multi-sectoral collaboration that we have fostered in Jamaica relating to the need to adopt standards for the design and manufacture of imported vehicles. One of the great contributions towards reducing the rate of motor vehicle deaths in the highly developed countries has been the development of such standards. In Europe and the United States, for example, government regulations require that vehicles protect passengers and other road users with enhanced environmental performance standards; front- and side-airbag impact protection; roll-over protection; three-point seat belts; and a growing list of designs and devices that help passengers avoid crashes and survive when crashes do occur.

Unfortunately, many of the low- and middle-income countries — where the great majority of road traffic deaths occur — do not currently have the capacity to enforce such standards. In Jamaica, about 48 per cent of road fatalities involve motor vehicle occupants, many of them as passengers in vehicles that would not meet the minimum standards for the United States or the European Union. A truly global standard that manufacturers are obliged to comply with would go a long way towards protecting the citizens of countries like Jamaica, where this standard could be legally adopted and used to screen vehicles imported to our shores. Jamaica has recently had costly experience in terms of serious injuries and fatalities from the importation of defective used vehicles, a situation that needs to be quickly and seriously remedied. I therefore call for the establishment of a global motor vehicle safety standard that would establish the minimum standard for vehicles manufactured anywhere in the world, and I hope that the United Nations global ministerial conference will address that.

Secondly, I make an urgent plea for Jamaica and other countries in the region to have easier access to the International Road Assessment Programme for risk-mapping and tracking the safety performance of the road network. That assessment will provide us with the protocols for measuring risk, setting benchmarks and utilizing a star rating that gives a road protection score. I am particularly interested in that initiative, as it relates directly to my ministerial portfolio. I look

forward to the day when we can strengthen our safety management capacity in conformity with agreed principles and best practices, of course with the required assistance.

Jamaica is working to get out of the mindset of constructing roads without due attention to the safe use of the facilities. Accordingly, we are numbered among the nations that are signatory to the Make Roads Safe petition. Our previous Prime Minister was therefore the first signatory, and our current Prime Minister has affixed his signature since assuming office.

Thirdly and finally, our experience at the national and regional levels has taught us the critical importance of employing multi-sectoral collaboration in addressing this epidemic of road traffic injuries. Dire projections have been made about the devastation that will occur if we do not take action quickly and act together to fight this modern-day scourge.

The proposal for a United Nations global ministerial conference therefore provides the perfect opportunity for the international community to mobilize the leaders in the transport sector. It will also serve to focus our minds on practical solutions that can make a lasting difference and create the opportunity for enhanced leadership, which can assist in reducing the devastation now taking place in the developing world. That is against the background of the chilling data that every one to three minutes a child dies from a road accident; that is not just information found in a research document, but the reality faced by countless families and communities.

On behalf of the Prime Minister and people of Jamaica, I therefore express our full support for the draft resolution to be adopted this morning, calling for the first ever United Nations ministerial conference on road safety, and hope that it will receive overwhelming endorsement from the international community.

I look forward to the day when the nations of this planet can turn the tide and reap the benefits of safer travel on our roadways. Our concerted actions today with the adoption of this draft resolution will serve to further solidify a global partnership of collaboration and cooperation, which I know will overcome all impediments to achieving that endeavour.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Slovenia, Her Excellency Ms. Sanja Štiglic.

Ms. Štiglic (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.

Traffic collisions are at epidemic levels in many countries, and there seems to be a widespread acceptance that they are an inevitable consequence of ever-increasing mobility. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that in 2002 almost 1.2 million people died in road crashes worldwide, and as many as 50 million were injured. Failure to act could not only double the number by 2020, but would see injuries from road traffic rise to be the third highest contributor to the global burden of disease and injuries. Nonetheless, many societies and Governments have chosen to face this challenge. Indeed, mentalities are changing with regard to road safety: road accident fatalities are no longer accepted as an inevitable corollary of increased mobility.

In the EU, we can look to the successes of countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands. Against the background of rising vehicle numbers and increases in driver numbers, those States have recorded dramatic reductions in road casualty levels. In parallel to those success stories, other European countries have also achieved considerable improvements. It is important to underline that those successes are generally based on the adoption of wide-ranging planned approaches to road safety policy with ambitious targets.

In fact, the EU has recognized that there is scope for greater advances if all of the member States are prepared to share not just a vision for the future but also the best practice that has delivered such progress at the national level in the past. Referring to recent developments in that regard, the European Commission has issued a mid-term review of the European Road Safety Action Programme, expressing that we have accomplished a lot in the last five years, yet more must be done together to achieve our objectives. The European Road Safety Action Programme, established by the European Commission in June 2003, has at its core the goal of achieving a reduction of 50 per cent in

the number of people killed in traffic collisions by 2010 as compared to 2001.

The European Parliament and the Council of European Ministers of Transport have, on several occasions, subscribed explicitly to that goal. In doing so, they have placed road safety very high on the political agenda, where it will remain, since they have also acknowledged that improving road safety requires a continuous effort.

The Programme identifies excessive speed, drinking and driving, and not using protective measures, such as seat belts and motorcycle helmets, as the main causes of collisions and as major contributing factors to their effects. For that reason, it underlines the urgent need for stricter enforcement of existing legislation in that respect. Furthermore, the Action Programme provides European States with an overview of the relevant information that is required in order to achieve the goal of a 50-per cent reduction of road accident fatalities. It also describes structures through which we can better address those issues and provides the information required to replicate the performance of those States which have taken the lead in road safety policy.

The Programme also places great emphasis on the absolute need to engage civil society in the delivery of better road safety. To that effect, it encourages the signing of a road safety charter by actors from the public and private sectors, in which those actors should list their individual aims and actions concerning road safety.

The EU Action Programme also places great emphasis on the need to gather collision data and information relating to collision prevention programmes deployed in each of the member States. That will be achieved through the establishment of the European Road Safety Observatory, which shall disseminate information on best practices in addressing road safety challenges.

Of course, it is clear that we should exchange best practices across all nations worldwide, not just within the European Union. We can all learn from the relevant experience of other nations in that context. To meet that challenge, we highly appreciate the initiative of the Russian Federation to host and provide the necessary financial support for the first global high-level conference on road safety, to be held in 2009, to bring together delegations of ministers and

representatives to discuss and to exchange information and best practices.

The lack of visibility of road traffic injuries has a direct impact on political will to recognize and address the problem. Against that background, the EU established a European Road Safety Day. The first European Road Safety Day on 27 April 2007 was a day for young people to share experiences. It focused on the subjects of alcohol and drugs in traffic, training and education. The second road safety day, to be held on 13 October 2008 in Paris, will address the subject of road safety in our cities.

Having heard that the major contributing factors to road crashes and injuries are drunk driving, lack of helmet use, seat belt non-compliance, excessive speed and poor infrastructure design and management, we know that many of those deaths are preventable. That is why we must act together to take up the challenge to drastically reduce the numbers of our citizens who needlessly lose their lives on roads every day of every year.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the United Kingdom, His Excellency The Honourable Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, Chairman of the Commission for Global Road Safety.

Lord Robertson (United Kingdom): Today we have the opportunity to begin to turn the tide — a terrible tide of bloodshed on the world's roads. I carry with me at all times a small photograph of my road crash 32 years ago — a reminder of how lucky I am to be here today — but millions of others carry the injuries of road crashes throughout their blighted lives, and tens of millions of others who have died on the world's roads will carry nothing ever again.

That is why today matters. Today's debate in the General Assembly and the draft resolution before us can mark the moment when the world community looks out at the suffering and at the grief and at the cost of road crashes and decides to end it. That is in our power to do. We have the tools, we have the knowledge and we have the means. What we have to do now is act.

We have to act for Le Xuan Han, who died on a road in Ho Chi Minh City last month, just a few weeks before her ninth birthday, because she was not wearing a motorcycle helmet and because the rider who crashed into her family had been drinking. We have to do it for

Mukela Mumbuna, a young and gifted Zambian woman who left behind her husband and five-month-old baby when she died in a bus crash caused by a speeding driver, and for Baligeya in Uganda, who lost a leg and therefore his livelihood when he was knocked down by a hit-and-run driver. After months in hospital, he now faces a future of constant pain and poverty, unable to provide for his family again. No crash helmet; inappropriate speed; drunken driving — collectively we know how to tackle those problems. Unsafe vehicles; badly designed roads; no seat belt — those are all solvable problems.

Most of those present will know me as an individual from jobs that I have held in the past, as the Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom and then as the leader of NATO, the world's most successful defence alliance. They will know that I spend most of my time preoccupied with the statistics, casualties and consequences of military conflicts worldwide, and most of them will know some basic statistics about some of the best-known conflicts. The number who died in Viet Nam is known by every United States citizen; the number of casualties in Afghanistan is known by every Russian citizen; and concerning your country, Sir, we are all too aware of the casualties of the conflict going on in Iraq today.

And yet all of those figures are dwarfed by the carnage that takes place on the world's roads every day of every year. We know about some of those casualties; it is time that we acted on the day-to-day misery that is being created on our roads in our countries today. We must act for all the millions of people who have been killed or left maimed in this decade alone; for the 500 children who die every day, leaving their parents with a grief that we only imagine; and for the millions of lives that we could save in the decades ahead if we implemented the policies and solutions that are proved to work — that are proved to save lives and to make the roads safer.

So I am delighted that the General Assembly is supporting the recommendation of the Commission for Global Road Safety — which I am proud to chair — in our report *Make Roads Safe*, to organize the first ever global United Nations ministerial conference on road safety. I also welcome recognition by the Assembly for the work that is being done by the World Bank's Global Road Safety Facility and for the need for road safety to become an integral element of road infrastructure project design.

I would also pay tribute to the Sultanate of Oman and Ambassador Al-Hinai for leading the effort to secure a new United Nations resolution. I also want to thank the Government of the Russian Federation and General Kirianov for generously offering to host the ministerial conference next year and for their leadership in global road safety. I want to thank all of the countries that have supported this draft resolution and will be vital to the success of the forthcoming United Nations conference, and particularly the Government of the United Kingdom, which has sponsored this draft resolution and allowed me to speak on its behalf today.

I would like to thank President Arias of Costa Rica, former United States President Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mrs. Mary Robinson of Ireland and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi of India, who are among those who have joined me in signing an Open Letter to the United Nations urging action today.

I also recognize Michelle Yeoh, Jean Todt and David Ward of the FIA Foundation, who are here with me today at this momentous General Assembly meeting. And I ask the Assembly to take note of the more than one million people across the world who have cared enough to sign the petition to the United Nations urging action.

This effort — this huge effort — will require both political will and public support. It is a challenge that we need to face together, the rich and the poor, the North and the South, the developed and the less developed worlds. And the United Nations ministerial conference will be an important milestone in this effort — a chance to come together, to review progress, to share knowledge, but most of all, to plan the action ahead of us. Today we can begin to turn the tide.

We, the United Nations, can determine to recognize the scale of this modern global epidemic of road deaths and injuries, and we can decide that the time has come to act to stop it.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Mr. Arturo Cervantes Trejo, General Director of the National Centre on Accident Prevention.

Mr. Trejo (Mexico) (spoke in Spanish): I would like to thank the Assembly for the privilege of addressing this sixty-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Allow me also to convey greetings from the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, and from the Minister of Health of Mexico, Dr. José Ángel Córdoba Villalobos.

Mexico is no stranger to the problem of road safety and road traffic injuries, which affect countries throughout the world. Every year, road traffic injuries are responsible for the deaths of more than 17,000 Mexicans, which is the equivalent to losing 47 people a day. Fifteen of them are pedestrians, which is a group at particularly high risk. Alarming, road traffic accidents are the number one killer of children, teenagers and young adults between the ages of 5 and 35 in our country.

Apart from these high death rates, road accidents have resulted in more than 750,000 hospitalizations, and many millions of injured have required medical attention. Road injuries are the second leading cause of permanent disability and also the second leading cause of orphanhood in our country.

In our country, the number of road accidents is on the rise, with official figures placing the growth in the number of accidents at more than 45 per cent in the current decade.

Estimates place the economic burden of road traffic injuries in Mexico at more than \$100 million per year. Of these, \$45 million is the estimated costs of hospitalization, surgery, medical treatment and rehabilitation services. Material damages are estimated at \$13 million, and more than \$35 million is due to the drop in productivity, the loss of income that the deceased, who are economically active members of society, would have produced. Their average age at death is 35.

Victims of traffic accidents are mostly people who are starting their families. They tend to have these accidents at a time when they are most productive economically. Thus, the consequences for families, communities, the economy and the country as a whole, are devastating.

The epidemic of traffic injuries in Mexico is compounded by many social, economic and cultural factors. Among them, the country is becoming largely urban, with more than 80 per cent of the population living in urban areas. In addition, the vehicle fleet, including motorcycles, trucks and buses, has increased

in size by more than 60 per cent in the last decade, standing at more than 24 million motor vehicles.

Research presented at the ninth World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, held in the second week of this month of March in the city of Merida, Mexico, suggests that the high rate of pedestrian road traffic deaths in large cities is not just a problem of the developing world, but also in the most developed countries. So we need to do a better job of protecting vulnerable road users in all of our cities.

Alarming, it is important to mention the estimated number of accidents, injuries, disability and deaths related to motor vehicle traffic accidents tend to be much higher than official statistics would show. That is true both in Mexico and in other countries of the region, because of the significant underreporting of road traffic accidents and the casualties that result therefrom.

According to data from the World Health Organization and the World Bank, traffic injuries now constitute a true global epidemic, and Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest road traffic fatality rates of any region in the world.

The economic burden, as was mentioned by the Minister of Costa Rica and the Minister of Jamaica, is very high and climbing. Some of the problems that contribute to this pandemic in the region are associated with the increased urbanization of the population, the increased availability and use of motor vehicles, including a substantial increase in motorcycles, poor quality of roads, streets and highways, the absence of road safety education for all types of transport and road users, as well as the lack of sustainable mass transportation systems and adequate urban planning, among other causes.

Mexico, therefore, recognizes with concern that all countries of the world must confront this problem together. It is essential that all countries share knowledge and efforts regarding road safety and bring together all our knowledge and our scientific, technical, human and economic resources to face this pandemic in a well-coordinated global effort. It is a matter not only of economics, but also of social justice.

I should say that encouraging things are taking place in the Latin America and Caribbean region, in that we are beginning to work together, as the representatives of Costa Rica and Jamaica have already

pointed out. In September 2006 at San José, Costa Rica, we held the first regional Road Safety Stakeholders Forum, at which a significant number of institutions — including the World Bank, the Pan American Health Organization, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Development Bank and the FIA Foundation — demonstrated genuine leadership and united to raise awareness and take action on the very important issue of road safety. Thanks to that collaborative effort and the leadership of those institutions and a number of key individuals, the region has begun to mobilize multisectoral efforts to promote road safety in the region.

As previous speakers have mentioned, a Transitional Commission was established following that first meeting of key stakeholders in Costa Rica. Nobel Peace Prize laureate President Oscar Arias Sánchez is the honorary president of the Commission. Members of the Transitional Commission include the founding institutions to which I have referred and governmental and civil society representatives from across the region.

In December 2007, the second regional Forum of Road Safety Stakeholders was held in Puerto Rico. A large number of key regional officials representing Governments and institutions met with one common goal, namely, to reduce the number of people injured and killed on our streets and highways. Participants also shared a common vision: safe roads in Latin America and the Caribbean. Along with those regional stakeholders, Mexico has been an active participant working towards a regional approach to road safety in order to promote cooperation, pool resources and share knowledge to speed up the development of national capacities to promote road safety.

Mexico is proud to inform the General Assembly that, for the first time in the region, two weeks ago, on 14 March, at Mérida, we held a ministerial meeting on violence and injury prevention. That event took place on the eve of the ninth World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion. Twenty-nine countries of the Americas met at that unprecedented meeting of health ministers to discuss the issue of both intentional and unintentional injuries. Participating countries agreed that additional efforts were needed to address those major public health issues. They also committed themselves to taking significant steps to respond to this regional pandemic.

The ministerial meeting at Mérida resulted in the signing of the Ministerial Declaration on Violence and Injury Prevention in the Americas by more than 24 countries. We will provide a copy of the Declaration to the General Assembly for its records. The 24 signatory countries committed themselves to important steps that will help us to improve road safety in the region. Those steps included recognizing that injuries constitute a priority public health problem and that we need to intensify regional prevention efforts. They also committed themselves to develop, implement and evaluate national injury-prevention plans, as well as to encourage the establishment of strategic agreements and alliances in order to develop national policies on the prevention of injuries. Moreover, they committed themselves to strengthening or establishing injury-prevention units within their ministries of health offices that are endowed with appropriate budgets, staff and authority. Signatories also agreed to strengthen data collection efforts on injuries and to improve the provision of health care services to victims of injuries.

Mexico worked very closely with the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization in planning and preparing for the ministerial conference. We would like to thank both of them for their leadership in promoting road safety, as well as for the ongoing technical support they provide us.

As underscored in the draft resolution we are debating today, Mexico is participating actively with the World Health Organization in the preparation of the global road safety status report now under way. Mexico has been chosen to be part of a new effort by the World Health Organization to develop pilot policies and programmes aimed at preventing the needless loss of life on the streets and roads of our planet. The World Health Organization has received financing from the Bloomberg Family Foundation, which will help to significantly decrease the number of persons killed, injured or left disabled as a result of traffic accidents. That is an area of public health that has received very little funding in recent years.

In order to augment the resources being provided by the Bloomberg Family Foundation and the World Health Organization, the Mexican Government has decided to invest double the amount we are receiving in the pilot programmes that have begun to operate in four of the main cities of our country. Those programmes are aimed at tackling such important risk

factors as driving while intoxicated, the use of seat belts and child restraints in vehicles, speed control initiatives and pedestrian road safety issues.

An unprecedented national programme on road safety was recently launched by our Minister of Health. Our National Centre for Injury Prevention, which I have the honour to lead, has been granted a significant budget and appropriate human resources to carry out road safety initiatives at the national level. We hope to be able to share our positive results and experiences in the area of road safety at the 2009 global ministerial conference.

Mexico's Ministry of Health has demonstrated strong support because we believe that the health sector can contribute to improving road safety in various ways. First of all, our public health initiatives are focused on prevention, although we do not ignore the areas of emergency medical treatment, hospitalization, long-term care and rehabilitation. We are focused on prevention. Our approach to public health is based on science. It is an intrinsically collaborative approach that highlights the need for a multisectoral focus, which we hope will characterize the first global ministerial conference on road safety that has been proposed for November 2009 in the Russian Federation.

Mexico strongly supports this draft resolution on improving global road safety, which was introduced today by the representative of Oman. We agree that we need to build greater political will and to implement the recommendations of the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention* and the resolutions of the General Assembly on improving global road safety.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): At the outset I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his note transmitting the report on the implementation of resolution 60/5, on improving global road safety (A/62/257). I would also like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for taking the initiative to bring attention to the important issue of the global road safety crisis. He may be assured of our full support, for no countries are immune to this modern scourge, even islands far away from other countries.

The statistics in the report tell a grim story. Every year, nearly 1.2 million people die in traffic accidents and millions more are injured or disabled. Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death globally for

those between the ages of 10 and 24. That figure is comparable to death rates from malaria or tuberculosis.

To a large extent, the solution to the problem involves raising awareness and persuading motorists to change their behaviour. In other words, road traffic injuries can be prevented.

Unlike many other countries, the large majority of road accident fatalities in Iceland do not occur in cities. Indeed, the accident rate in built-up areas has declined significantly over recent years, and now statistics show that last year over 90 per cent of road accidents in Iceland occurred in the countryside. The concern in Iceland is that actions to reduce the number of those severely injured in traffic accidents have failed to show results. Studies have confirmed other findings that attribute road accidents to a number of key factors: speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, failure to use seat belts and poor infrastructure.

In light of this information, the Icelandic Ministry of Transport, Communications and Municipal Affairs has developed a four-year traffic safety plan, for the years 2007 to 2010, which was adopted by the Icelandic parliament in 2007 as a part of the general transport policy plan. The main aim of the traffic safety plan is to take action against driving under the influence of alcohol and/or substances and against speeding and not wearing seatbelts, as well as to introduce measures to improve road infrastructure and other tasks specified in the plan. The plan places special emphasis on road safety education for all children from preschool to 18 years of age. The aim of the project is that the children will enjoy comprehensive road safety education that will lay the foundation for responsible traffic behaviour and thereby challenge the notion that road accidents are unavoidable.

Icelandic authorities noted with special interest the announcement of the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week, 23 to 29 April 2007, which was dedicated to young road users. It was implemented in an effective manner in Iceland, with a variety of programmes taking place throughout the week. Interestingly, figures showed a sharp decline in road traffic accidents during the Road Safety Week compared to the same week the year before, and the same trend continued the weeks after.

The success of the United Nations Global Road Safety Week in Iceland was mainly due to successful collaboration among interested parties, such as the Government, the police, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and the media. The United Nations initiative to organize the Road Safety Week worldwide underlines the value and significance of international cooperation in the area, especially with regard to efforts to be undertaken in the developing countries.

Iceland is proud to be a sponsor of the draft resolution A/62/L.43 on global road safety, introduced earlier today by my friend Ambassador Fuad Al-Hinai. We highly value his proactive and constructive role in bringing this important issue to the attention of the United Nations.

Road traffic injuries continue to be an important public health and development issue. They threaten to undermine the development gains in many countries and impose a huge economic burden on developing countries. We must therefore intensify our international efforts to raise awareness about global road safety.

Iceland warmly welcomes the offer by the Russian Federation to host and provide the necessary financial support for the first global high-level conference on road safety, to be held in 2009. Such a conference should complement national and regional efforts to promote road safety and bring together transport, infrastructure and health ministers. It will play an important role in scaling up the political and institutional response to global road safety.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I would first like to thank the Secretary-General for transmitting the report entitled "Improving global road safety" (A/62/257) to the General Assembly for consideration. I would also like to thank the World Health Organization (WHO) for preparing this report in consultation with partners of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. Our special thanks go to the delegations of Oman and the Russian Federation for their relentless efforts in drafting the resolution on improving global road safety, which my delegation is honoured to co-sponsor.

We are encouraged by the considerable collaborative efforts that have been made at the national, regional and international levels to address road safety since the adoption of resolution 60/5 in October 2005. However, we are alarmed by the report

that this year road traffic injuries continue to be a major health problem and a leading cause of death, injury and disability around the world, with nearly 1.2 million people losing their lives and millions of others being injured and disabled. Those injuries constitute not only a major health concern, but are also a threat to the hard-earned development achievements in many countries.

The annual costs of road traffic crashes in low- and middle-income countries are estimated to be between \$65 billion and \$100 billion — more than the total amount received in development aid. The regret here is that, as suggested by WHO, such tragic road traffic injuries could largely have been prevented and controlled through rational analysis and counter-measures.

Viet Nam has always been among the countries in the spotlight whenever the issue of road traffic safety is raised. Given its high population density, fast urbanization process and continuously high economic growth rates resulting in a rapid increase in the numbers of vehicles on the road, Viet Nam's transport infrastructures failed to develop accordingly.

Awareness of road users remained low with regard to observance of traffic safety legislation. Consequently, the number of road traffic accidents went up sharply. Official statistics showed that in 2007 there were approximately 15,000, making up 96 per cent of traffic accidents of all types. Most deaths and injuries occurred to people between age 15 and 49, who account for 56 per cent of the total population and who are the most economically active. A study by the Asian Development Bank conducted only from an economic perspective estimated that in 2002 and 2003, traffic accidents in Viet Nam cost the country close to \$900 million per year.

Deeply conscious of the tremendous consequences of road traffic accidents, especially the links between road safety and sustainable development, the Government of Viet Nam has attached great importance and given high priority to the issue of road safety. The National Strategic Plan for Traffic Safety Improvement 2001-2010 was designed to upgrade the transport infrastructure system; develop a legal system relevant to ensuring traffic safety; establish a traffic accident database; put in place information, education and communication campaigns; involve all governmental and non-governmental, national and

local organizations in road traffic safety; set up a vehicle safety inspection system; and carry out strict enforcement measures. A series of policies and mechanisms have been introduced to provide incentives for good practices and impose sanctions against violations. The National Traffic Safety Committee was established as the inter-agency governmental body responsible for leading and coordinating the implementation of national road safety plans among various ministries and localities. Last year saw the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week observed in Viet Nam, with diverse information, education and communication activities conducted and safety regulations and law enforcement tightened.

All those efforts combined have brought about certain initial positive results. Here, due to time constraints, allow me to give the Assembly just one example of such a result: the reduction in the levels of head trauma caused by accidents involving motorcycles, the most popular means of personal transport in Viet Nam.

By October 2005, Viet Nam had around 16 million registered motorcycles, or approximately one for five people. In 2005, 70 per cent of the road crashes involved motorcyclists, and 88 per cent of the associated death tolls resulted from head trauma. Data from Cho Ray Hospital, the largest hospital in the largest and most populated city of the country, Ho Chi Minh City, show that 85 per cent of its traffic-related patients were motorcyclists and nearly 74 per cent of its traffic-related hospitalizations were due to head injuries.

Therefore safety for motorcyclists through helmet-wearing has been considered a policy issue of top priority by the Vietnamese Government. All possible means, including education, publicity campaigns, law enforcement, have been employed in order to raise helmet-wearing levels. A real breakthrough was made when Government resolution No. 32 was endorsed, according to which, starting on 15 December 2007, helmet-wearing became mandatory on all roads in Viet Nam. The three and a half months since then represent a very short time, and I do not have concrete figures yet about the improvement of the traffic safety situation. However, as a witness of the surprisingly strict observance of that resolution throughout the country, I can assure the Assembly of

the visibly and significantly lower rates of deaths among traffic accidents.

The credit for all of that goes to many players: the Government, with its political will; the people, with their increased awareness and improved sense of compliance with the law; the private sector, with its initial yet energetic involvement; and the people's organizations, with their innovative and flexible participation.

Last but certainly not least, the foreign factor has an extremely important role to play here. Over the past years, we have worked closely with and received valuable financial and technical assistance from many international partners, among them the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and WHO, to name but a few. Many non-governmental and civil society organizations, including the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, Handicap International, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its French and American member societies, have been active in Viet Nam, bringing fruitful cooperation and assistance to us. In the helmet-wearing campaign alone, which I just mentioned, we have enjoyed organic collaboration from many international organizations and individuals, most notably the Global Road Safety Initiative, the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, and movie star Michelle Yeoh, the Goodwill Ambassador of the International Automobile Federation.

Allow me to avail myself of this opportunity to express the profound gratitude of the Vietnamese Government and people to the international community for its noteworthy contributions to addressing traffic problems in Viet Nam. In this connection, I would also like to express our appreciation and support to the offer by the Government of the Russian Federation to host, in 2009, the first global ministerial conference on road safety, and to state that we look forward to positive practical results from that major event.

As we look ahead, road traffic safety remains an issue fraught with huge challenges, demanding synergetic global efforts. We in Viet Nam are committed to doubling our efforts in developing and effectively implementing road safety programmes and action plans. In doing so, we shall use the "World report on road traffic injury prevention" and the draft resolution on improving global road safety, to be

adopted, I believe, by the Assembly at its current session, as the framework within which to reach the target of a 5 to 7 per cent reduction of deaths involving traffic accidents by 2010, as outlined in Decision No. 259 that our Prime Minister signed earlier this month, on 4 March 2008. We again sincerely express the hope that Viet Nam will continue to receive highly needed cooperation and assistance from the international community.

Mrs. Sahussarungsi (Thailand): I should like to join the distinguished representatives who have spoken before me in expressing my delegation's appreciation to the President for bringing the critical issue of global road safety to the attention of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I wish to commend Oman for its long-standing dedication to global road safety. My delegation also expresses appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for taking the lead by offering to host the very first high-level global conference on road safety in 2009. That upcoming high-level conference will indeed raise to new heights the level of attention and awareness of the international community with respect to the global road safety crisis. This is rightfully deserved, since each year more than 1.2 million people are killed and 50 million injured on the world's roads.

It is my delegation's firm belief that, despite the devastating nature of this global epidemic, which kills people on a scale comparable to that of malaria and tuberculosis, road traffic deaths and injuries can be prevented and scaled down with vigorous and sustained efforts from all stakeholders at both the national and international levels.

Road crashes are now the leading cause of death worldwide for children and young people aged between 10 and 24. Alarming, more than half of road traffic casualties worldwide are in the 15-44 age group, which is the key wage-earning and child-raising group. The *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention* of 2004 projected that, by 2020, the crash death rate in low- and middle-income countries will increase by 80 per cent if nothing substantial is done. The multiplier effects of traffic deaths and injuries can be disastrous and pose grave threats in terms of family loss, human resources, and economic and social loss for the countries as a whole. The economic burden for developing economies from that crisis has amounted to 1 to 2 per cent of gross national product in most countries each year. The annual cost of road traffic

crashes in low-income and middle-income countries is estimated at between \$65 billion and \$100 billion. That is by no means insignificant, as those economic costs could impact negatively on the social and economic development efforts of many countries.

In that connection, I would like to commend the World Health Organization (WHO) for its role as the coordinator on road safety issues within the United Nations system. The Secretary-General's report in document A/62/257, prepared by WHO, captures well the progress made in improving global road safety in various aspects, particularly the collaboration between the United Nations regional commissions and other United Nations agencies and international partners to implement General Assembly resolutions 58/289 and 60/5, as well as the recommendations contained in the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*. Other important and useful deliberations include the launch of numerous awareness campaigns and advocacy activities and the development of good-practice guides on road traffic injury data collection and research. Such multi-stakeholder participation and measures will promote great success in our efforts to overcome the global road safety crisis.

Thailand attaches great importance to the issue of road safety and witnesses the loss of precious lives each day. In 2003, road crashes in Thailand accounted for 14,012 deaths and 79,692 injuries. The death toll and injuries peaked during the annual new year holidays in January and during Songkran, the traditional Thai new year holidays, in April. The majority of those injured are motorcyclists. About 30 per cent of road traffic crashes are alcohol-related. The issue of road safety is therefore high on our national agenda. The Road Safety Operation Centre headed by the Deputy Prime Minister was established in 2003 as the lead agency to oversee and coordinate the efforts of various sectors on road safety in an integrated manner to prevent and reduce road crashes and to raise road safety standards through the implementation of Thailand's national strategy on road safety.

The strategy encompasses the "five E's" components: first, law enforcement; secondly, engineering focused on improving road conditions; thirdly, educational information and participation; fourthly, emergency medical services; and fifthly, evaluation. The Centre also plans and implements the plan of action and encourages cooperation from

Government agencies, private organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society. The successful key deliberations include the "Do Not Drink and Drive" campaign, a campaign to encourage wearing safety helmets, imposing mandatory requirements for wearing safety belts and enforcing speed limits, and engaging community participation in public education and awareness. Through relentless efforts from all sides, the number of deaths from road injury per year fell from 14,012 in 2003 to 12,492 in 2007, and the number of casualties during the Songkran festival holidays fell dramatically from 848 deaths and 52,058 injuries to only 361 deaths and 4,805 injuries in 2007.

Thailand believes that cooperation at the regional and international levels on global road safety can contribute greatly to the success of our common cause. For that reason, Thailand has participated in and acted upon recommendations from many forums, including the United Nations resolutions, the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*, the ministerial declaration on improving road safety in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the Phnom Penh ministerial declaration on road safety in the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Thailand proclaimed 2004 as the Year of Road Safety and organized various activities to complement the WHO's global road safety campaign. In April 2007, Thailand organized United Nations Road Safety Week, with a focus on young road users. Moreover, Thailand joined other Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) members in commemorating ACD Road Safety Day on 25 April 2007, which also complemented the United Nations Road Safety Week campaign. At the regional level, ASEAN has developed the five-year ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan (2005-2010), which will strengthen cooperation in the region and promote the safer use of roads.

For many countries, the lack of financial resources is a major obstacle to their efforts to increase road safety. Mobilizing resources is a challenge that requires greater attention from the international community. In that regard, Thailand welcomes the progress of the Global Road Safety Facility set up in 2006 under the World Bank, which has already received funding from many sources to support road safety implementation.

In conclusion, while global road safety remains a challenge, considerable progress has been achieved at the national and international levels. It is both a public health and a development issue, so it requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society and the world community as a whole to tackle and help make the use of roads safer for all.

Mr. Nikitov (Ukraine): At the outset, my delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by the delegation of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

We would like to thank the Secretariat for the report of the Secretary-General submitted under agenda item 46, "Global road safety crisis", which provides an update on the status of implementation of the recommendations made in General Assembly resolution 60/5 on improving global road safety.

Ukraine hopes that the collaborative advocacy efforts recently made at the international level have served to increase awareness about road safety at the national and international levels.

Rapid industrial development, based on progress in technologies, is a characteristic feature of the development that the world has seen in the last few decades. Undoubtedly, the development of the engineering industry is also a characteristic feature of world development. As a result, the stock of cars in the world is constantly growing.

The positive effects of this process on the development of society are indisputable. However, it also brings a substantial level of danger. As the use of different means of transportation becomes more widespread, the potential for human and material losses due to accidents increases.

Deaths as a result of car accidents and road traffic injuries constitute a significant and increasing threat to the health of the world's population. Until now, road safety has not been part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the Millennium Declaration and often has not been included in the programmes for sustainable economic development.

There are obvious obstacles to achieving and maintaining road traffic safety regimes. The low technical capacities in many countries and the lack of qualified specialists in this area slow down the development and introduction of effective strategies and programmes regarding road safety. As a result,

global problems of road safety are often missing as a priority public health issue in either national or regional policies. Limited investment in road infrastructure also contributes to the increase in the number of deaths and injuries resulting from road accidents.

Therefore, we call on all involved parties to expedite technical and financial assistance to strengthen and improve cooperation in the area of road safety, taking into account the needs of those most at risk. The development of a robust road infrastructure can also ensure wider employment opportunities, training of staff and public health improvement. It will increase the level of foreign investment in the economy.

Turning to my country specifically, Ukraine is facing the many challenges and threats of the global road safety crisis. Recently we have observed a significant increase in road traffic injuries as a result of road accidents. I would like to inform the Assembly that in response to this threat the President of Ukraine, Mr. Victor Yushchenko, and the Government of my country have initiated legislation designed to minimize the number of road accidents and to reduce injuries and loss of human life.

We will continue to spare no effort in increasing the level of responsibility for violations of traffic rules and regulations and in establishing an effective State system on improving road safety. In this regard, Ukraine welcomes the relevant provisions of the draft resolution before us (A/62/L.43), and, as one of its sponsors, looks forward to its effective implementation, especially at the level of the United Nations regional commissions.

Mr. Sen (India): We thank the Secretary-General for his note transmitting the comprehensive and useful report of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the global road safety crisis (A/62/257), prepared in accordance with resolution 60/5 of 26 October 2005. We would also like to express our appreciation to the delegation of Oman for its continuous efforts in support of this agenda item.

India attaches great importance to addressing the problem of road traffic safety. India has one of the largest road networks in the world, spanning more than 3.3 million kilometres. Road traffic has been increasing by more than 10 per cent per annum since the turn of the century. In addition, the share of road traffic in

total traffic has been growing steadily — currently, 65 per cent of freight and 86 per cent of passenger traffic is carried by road. Compounding the problem is the fact that, while our national highways constitute only about 2 per cent of the road network, they carry 40 per cent of the total road traffic, resulting in heavy traffic density.

India is also conscious of the serious development and national health impact of road accidents. India has been working actively to enhance road safety and to reduce the adverse consequences of traffic accidents. As the WHO report recommends, India already has a lead agency on road safety issues. The Department of Road Transport and Highways of India has been entrusted with the responsibility for formulating policies for road safety. It develops road safety standards in the form of a national policy on road safety and by preparing and implementing the annual road safety plan. Further, it collects, compiles and analyses road accident statistics and takes steps towards the development of a road safety culture in the country by organizing various awareness campaigns in collaboration with civil society.

India believes that there are three aspects of road safety — engineering, enforcement and education, or “the three Es” — and is taking action on all three aspects. A special Committee on Road Safety and Traffic Management was set up and its report is being examined. India has joined the 1998 Agreement of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations in order to adopt international best practices in safety regulations of motor vehicles. Smart-card-based driving licences and vehicle registration certificates are now being issued in many parts of the country. Old laws and regulations are being reviewed and updated.

Extensive public awareness campaigns, involving non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, are organized periodically. Annual Road Safety Weeks are organized, with the nineteenth Road Safety Week being held recently from 1 to 7 January 2008 under the theme “Drive to care! Not to dare!” Awards are being given every year to institutions and individuals who have done commendable work in the field of road safety.

While many of the issues relating to enhancement of road safety and efforts to reduce road safety injuries are best tackled by national and local authorities, the

WHO report correctly highlights the importance of facilitating international cooperation in this regard. Developing countries are the worst affected by the impact of road accidents and the imperative for increasing international cooperation to assist developing countries to effectively address issues of road safety cannot be overemphasized.

Issues of capacity-building, technical assistance, exchange of best practices, advocacy and awareness-raising are some of the areas where greater cooperation is required, taking into account the needs of developing countries. In this regard, we commend the efforts of WHO and the United Nations regional commissions, particularly the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Mobilization of financial resources to assist efforts of developing countries is also crucial. While the WHO report identifies some funding facilities, these are far from commensurate with the magnitude of the problem and need to be scaled up urgently, particularly with regard to country programme support. We also need to be cognizant of the fact that it is not always feasible to universalize standards that may have been developed in one region, and specific circumstances in various parts of the world must therefore be taken into account.

Given this scenario, we strongly support calls for an international conference on global road safety under the auspices of the United Nations in order to enhance international cooperation in this important field. We warmly welcome and thank the Government of the Russian Federation for its initiative in hosting and financing the first global high-level (ministerial) conference on road safety in 2009. We hope that this initiative will provide the necessary impetus towards the holding of a United Nations conference on global road safety in the future.

Before concluding, I would like to express our satisfaction that the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration is “walking the talk” by improving the fleet safety within the organizations that are participants in this Collaboration, including the United Nations. This is an innovative approach that could perhaps be adopted by large corporations.

Mrs. Altimova (Kazakhstan): We are very grateful for this opportunity to add our voice in today's debate on this very special and crucial item. At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for

transmitting the report contained in document A/62/257, on the issue of global road safety. We would also like to commend the efforts made by the Permanent Missions of Oman and the Russian Federation in the preparation of the draft resolution (A/62/L.43) on global road safety. My country very much appreciates the opportunity provided to us to join the list of sponsors of the draft resolution.

We are very concerned that the rates of injury and death caused by traffic accidents are rising in many countries and leading to deaths among people in the most productive age groups. Statistics showing that there are more than 1 million deaths and 50 million injuries annually as a result of traffic accidents led us to address this problem at the international level alongside such issues as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the question of victims of armed conflict. However, despite the ominous statistics, there is a solution to this problem. Many countries have successfully overcome it by allocating more resources for the improvement of infrastructure. Some interventions require governmental commitment alone — such as the promulgation of relevant legislation pertaining to personal responsibility for safe driving.

Kazakhstan fully shares the global concern about the road safety crisis. We welcome the draft resolution before the Assembly, which would lay a foundation for further concerted actions by the international community to decrease the death toll on the roads.

Our most recent national statistics are alarming. In 2007, almost 24,000 people were the victims of traffic accidents. Almost 4,500 persons died, and about 19,000 were injured. All five of the risk factors referred to in the draft resolution contributed to those terrible statistics. Our vast territory, small population and uneven distribution of settlements — which makes maintaining infrastructure incredibly expensive — constitute additional negative factors.

Nevertheless, in his annual message to the people of Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev identified the development of road infrastructure and the introduction of global road standards as priority goals. The Government of Kazakhstan recently adopted a national transportation strategy for the period 2006-2015 that includes an allocation of \$26 billion in the budget to improve road infrastructure.

We are also undertaking some measures to combat the negative consequences of road accidents.

Legislation to strengthen accountability for unsafe driving and to improve the system of emergency care is currently being revised by the Parliament of Kazakhstan. Moreover, our country has established partnerships with such entities as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Those partnerships allow us to learn about successful experiences and best practices.

We would like to express our full support for the draft resolution, whose provisions are in line with Kazakhstan's commitment to making road safety a contributing factor in our country's sustainable development. We also welcome the decision of the Russian Federation to host, and provide the necessary financial support for, the first global high-level ministerial conference on road safety.

Ms. Carter-Foster (United States of America): Every year, 1.2 million people around the world die on the roads — over 3,000 each day, a toll comparable to that of malaria or tuberculosis — and 30 to 50 million are left injured and/or disabled. Most of those deaths and disabilities occur in developing countries, where the losses take a significant toll on familial and national incomes, reduce gross domestic product by 1 per cent or more and exceed the funds received in development assistance.

Losses due to road traffic injuries are preventable. We should not take them for granted and we should not accept road crashes and their associated costs in human lives as the price we pay for mobility or for economic growth and development. In the words of the theme of the 2007 United Nations Global Road Safety Week, "Road safety is no accident".

The United States supports this draft resolution (A/62/L.43), which calls for a ministerial conference on global road safety to raise global awareness and to elevate the issue of road traffic deaths and injuries and their associated costs to an international dialogue on specific actions all nations can take to minimize this scourge around the world. Our nation has already done much in support of the recommendations contained in the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*, and we will continue to do more.

We have learned much through the years, in terms of both human and technological advancements, enabling us to reduce road injuries and deaths. Yet each year 43,000 lives are lost on our nation's roads.

Through human and technological advancements, we have learned much about effective strategies to prevent crashes and reduce road injuries and deaths. We are willing to share those lessons with others who might benefit from our experiences in the United States and around the world.

Achievements in reducing road traffic deaths will not come easily or quickly. It has taken the United States decades to curb the rise in motor vehicle deaths, which peaked in the late 1960s. It took time to build safer roads and cars and to educate and train drivers and pedestrians. United States Government agencies such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and, most recently, the State Department have worked to advance the progress of global road safety efforts. In addition, non-government efforts, as exemplified by the work of active and passionate non-governmental organizations, have been instrumental in raising support for this issue.

Road safety impacts health, commerce, transportation and trade. It is an important economic development issue as well as a global safety concern. A ministerial conference will set into motion the collaboration needed by Governments, together with the international community and including partners in the non-governmental and private sectors, to reduce deaths and injuries on the roads. Under the leadership of the World Health Organization — working closely with health, transport, education and other national ministries, as well as the private sector — working cooperatively, we can achieve greater success, to be measured in thousands of lives saved.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening today's meeting on improving global road safety in order to take up the very informative report (A/62/257) transmitted by the Secretary-General. This is an important issue that affects the lives of people in every country in the world. Road traffic engenders dangers, particularly the accidents and the resulting injuries.

In Benin, the state of the transportation infrastructure, particularly the roads, quickly causes wear and tear on vehicles. Irregular and inadequate road signs and failure to meet technical standards for the often dilapidated vehicles, along with lack of respect for basic rules of the road due to the

indiscipline and dangerous behaviour of users, all increase the risks of human failing. Furthermore, inadequate income leads to overuse and poor maintenance of vehicles. Those are some of the factors that greatly increase the risk of serious accidents in countries of the South, like Benin.

Additionally, the chances of surviving a serious car accident, one requiring urgent intervention, are almost nil in certain countries like mine. That is due in particular to the distance to hospitals, the absence of any on-the-ground rapid response mechanisms, the lack of qualified staff and many other aggravating circumstances, which combine to seal the fate of victims of road accidents.

Traffic on inter-State roads takes a heavy toll among those who live alongside them. Innumerable lives have been torn apart by the endless stream of vehicles in transit.

Improving mobility for people and goods is an essential element of our national growth strategy for reducing poverty, adopted by the Government of Benin last April. It includes a national strategy for improving road traffic safety. The Government means to ensure the proper maintenance of existing road networks, but also to improve the management of road safety and to protect against damage caused by traffic, taking into account noise, air pollution and physical risk for the users. We also seek to strengthen environmental management and road safety through improved policing of risky behaviour.

One can only welcome the attention that the United Nations Development Group is giving to improving road traffic safety. That is an area where cooperation among the transport, health and safety sectors can efficiently help to reduce the risks faced by road users and promote accident and injury prevention, as well as the treatment of injuries, as necessary.

Beyond awareness-raising activities, particular attention should be given to promoting the necessary investment to improve transportation infrastructure and to strengthen the capacities of the health sector to deal with emergency services and treat injuries. It is clear that the implementation of a strict traffic control policy by the security services is of crucial importance in developing countries like Benin.

In this regard, we should welcome the creation by the World Bank of the Global Road Safety Facility,

whose objective is to reduce death and injury from road accidents in low- or middle-income countries such as my own. We welcome the efforts by countries contributing to this Facility and invite those that have a vehicle-manufacturing industry to make regular contributions.

The question of financing this Facility must be examined as an essential issue at the high-level conference on road safety. It would be important that particular attention be given to road traffic in developing countries as part of an integrated approach to defining effective strategies for the promotion of road safety. Equally important would be defining the functional mechanisms for mobilizing the resources required for the implementation of those strategies.

My delegation aligns itself with the draft resolution before the Assembly. We hope that its adoption and implementation will allow us to ensure the proper preparation and success of the world conference planned for Moscow in 2009.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the observer for the Holy See.

Mr. Swanepoel (Holy See): My delegation would like to thank the delegation of Oman for its leadership on this important issue and the Russian Federation for its generous offer to host a high-level meeting on road safety next year.

Human mobility and the transport of goods date back to the earliest periods of human history. The advent of new technologies has ushered in an ever-increasing national and international movement of peoples and goods. At the core of this phenomenon is the human person, for whom, as an inherently social being, roads and vehicles are not merely means for transporting goods, but are a vital element for fostering greater social interaction across boundaries.

Nowadays road safety impacts not only peoples in the developed world; it touches all, regardless of geographic location or economic status. Unfortunately, this global increase in movement has been accompanied by a sad rise in vehicle-related accidents, causing property damage, injuries and deaths. The fact that over 3,000 people die every day and that a traffic-related injury occurs nearly every six seconds demonstrates how the need for greater road safety has become an issue of international concern.

This problem calls for local, national and international leaders to adopt proactive road safety measures, so that the increasing human mobility should not come at the expense of human life itself. Such measures can be effective only if backed by the necessary political, social and economic capital.

While technical measures are necessary to address road safety, focus must also be given to the human factor. People are prone to blame traffic accidents on poor infrastructure, equipment or road conditions. However, an overwhelming majority of vehicular accidents and deaths are linked directly to driver behaviour, such as excessive speed, aggressive driving, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs and various forms of distraction.

Moreover, not only drivers, but also pedestrians should observe road safety rules and exercise due concern and care for others on the road.

As far back as 1956 and as recently as last year's document on road safety, the Holy See has constantly sought to educate drivers and other road users on their obligations and moral responsibilities, calling on them to respect traffic rules, observe speed limits, wear seat belts, avoid alcohol and, indeed, to take all road safety precautions.

My delegation welcomes the adoption of this resolution and looks forward to further discussions of this topic. We offer assurances of the Holy See's continued commitment to help improve road safety around the world.

The Acting President: In accordance with the resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Schulz (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): It has been ten years now since the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) devoted a special chapter of its annual World Disasters Report to road safety. That was the first international warning to be issued, the first time that anyone had said to the nations of the world: be aware, we are facing a major new public health crisis that will very rapidly assume the proportions of a disaster unless drastic, coordinated action is taken immediately.

Today, in 2008, road crashes rank up there with tuberculosis and malaria as major killers in global

terms and are the leading cause of death among people aged between 15 and 50, mainly in low- and middle-income countries. That is in spite of the fact that the most important measures that need to be taken are widely known. They are freely accessible and can be downloaded from the Internet. They are presented in the "World report on road traffic injury prevention". The question then is: why is progress not being made, as would seem imperative?

To start with, there is the fact that a lack of reliable data implies that the magnitude of the problem remains vastly underestimated and, besides human tragedy, the costs to societies and economies remain largely uncalculated. It is not just a question of new roads and new vehicles; it is also essential to ensure that roads incorporate safety features and that road users behave responsibly. Countries that have managed to lower road mortality have all done so by implementing the measures outlined in the world report.

It is those emergency measures, effective in any context, that we have set forth in a "Practical Guide on Road Safety: a Toolkit for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies". That Practical Guide, which is referenced in paragraph 19 of the report on improving global road safety (A/62/257), will help not only the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, but also the wider civil society in its work with the Government in order to scale up efforts to further improve road safety. The guide was jointly produced with the Global Road Safety Partnership, which is based at our IFRC Secretariat in Geneva.

That Practical Guide is a tool for action. It gives 20 clear recommendations and is available to the world through the Internet in four languages on the Federation's website: www.ifrc.org. It also acknowledges and commends the efforts undertaken by the United Nations family to address the problem, particularly the creation of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration, led by WHO, in which the IFRC is also a partner.

Following that publication, we are now moving, with the Global Road Safety Partnership, towards a second phase, which will involve regional workshops around the world. The first will be in Doha in mid-May 2008. That will also emphasize the special role National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can play as auxiliaries to their public authorities.

International advocacy for road safety has been making good progress since 2004, and this debate is evidence of some success. However, with rare exceptions, thus far donor countries have not included road safety in their international strategies for development cooperation, even though they consider it a priority challenge at home. There is certainly much room for change in that respect.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their millions of volunteers are often the first to arrive on the scene of a road accident and to assist the victims. As witnesses, we urge all Governments to take the magnitude of this problem very seriously and to join in partnership to reverse the current deadly trend. We highly commend the Sultanate of Oman for its leadership in drafting this year's draft resolution on global road safety and very much appreciate and fully support the idea of holding a global inter-ministerial conference on road safety, to be hosted by the Russian Federation next year.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/62/L.43, entitled "Improving global road safety".

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors: Afghanistan, Andorra, Cape Verde, China, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Sri Lanka and Zambia.

I give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Alves (Brazil): Brazil would like to join other delegations and also sponsor this important resolution.

The Acting President: May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/62/L.43?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 62/244).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 46?

It was so decided.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.50 p.m.



General Assembly

Sixty-second session

88th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 2 April 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Kerim (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (continued)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Statement by the President

The President: May I welcome participants to the second day of the General Assembly's thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I would like to begin by thanking all our panellists, special guests and the moderators. I would like in particular to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her comprehensive summary of yesterday's debate.

The expertise and experience that we brought to bear on this important issue has enabled the Assembly to have — in the words of one of our moderators, Kandeh Yumkella, Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, a frank, open and introspective dialogue. The panel discussions on poverty and hunger and education and health and the message from the President of Mali have reaffirmed our view that making progress on these targets will have a catalytic effect on all the Millennium Development Goals.

When I opened the debate yesterday, together with the Secretary-General, I set the context of our discussions. We know that our pace is too slow and that

we need a decisive impulse to mobilize all our efforts and involve all our partners to achieve all the MDGs in all countries on time. It is clear from our debate yesterday that we have the solutions. The key issue is that we all have to deliver on our commitments, scale up our efforts and accelerate progress. Failure is not an option.

But neither can we descend into mutual accusations that only divert our attention from action and undermine our partnership. Mutual accountability is the only way forward. When aid is effectively aligned behind national Governments and predictable over the long term, rapid progress can be achieved. Leaders across every level of the development system now need to hold themselves to account, as Jayaseelan Naidoo, Chairman of the Development Bank of Southern Africa, has rightly noted. We need to urgently translate political commitments made at the highest level into results on the ground. We need more commitment and dedication.

The year 2008 is when our promises must be delivered on the ground in order to have a lasting impact on the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable. Yesterday, high expectations were expressed about the General Assembly's leadership role, including at the high-level meeting in September 2008, which should focus on delivering tangible outcomes. I therefore look forward to participants' interventions today and tomorrow to send a strong signal to the many forthcoming meetings on development to be held this year, including those of the G-8, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the

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Economic and Social Council, as well as the Accra Conference and the Doha Conference on Financing for Development.

It is clear that the General Assembly wants to see concrete results on poverty and hunger and education and health, as well as more investment in agriculture and infrastructure, particularly in Africa, to achieve the MDGs on time. But our efforts must not end in 2008. I therefore propose that each year until 2015, the General Assembly convene a thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals to take stock of progress and to hold all partners to account for their promises.

As Prime Minister Vanhanen of Finland pointed out, development is the basis of our security and the means to achieve a more just society. All these elements are interlinked, and each represents one of the core values the United Nations was founded upon. A world with less poverty will be a safer one — a fairer and more secure place, one in which every person has the opportunity to fulfil their human potential. We should not lose sight of that goal.

Before proceeding further, I would like to draw the attention of members to some organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting. I turn first to the length of statements. In order to accommodate all the speakers inscribed on the list — and there are 117 currently inscribed — I urge speakers to adhere to the five-minute time limit for their statements, on the understanding that that would not preclude the distribution of more extensive texts. I appeal to speakers to cooperate in that respect.

Also, in order to assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speakers' rostrum that functions as follows. A green light will be activated at the start of a speaker's statement. An orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes. And a red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Joanne Massiah, Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda.

Ms. Massiah (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

As we pass the midway point between the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the target

dates of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is important to note that developing countries in general have made substantial progress in achieving critical development targets. Yet, much work remains to be done if the Development Goals and their corresponding targets, as envisaged by the Declaration of world leaders in 2000, are to be met by 2015.

Much of this lagging behind in the expected progress towards the MDGs is the result of insufficient resources to tackle emerging, as well as long-standing, challenges to development. At the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey in 2002, leaders from both developed and developing countries started to match development commitments with resources and action, generating a global agreement in which sustained reform by developing countries would be matched by direct support from the developed world in the form of aid, trade, debt relief and investment. That reinforced, and served as a reminder of, the shared responsibility of developed and developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Understanding our share of responsibility in achieving the MDGs, the Group of 77 and China acknowledges that a lot has been done to create enabling domestic environments for the achievement of the MDGs, and efforts are on the way to make even greater progress. Yet, we are being held back by a woeful failure to meet commitments.

Despite the progress made by developing countries, commitments to increase the provision of resources have not been fulfilled. There is a commitment to collaborate on international resource mobilization, but the international financial environment is still not transparent, stable or predictable. There is a commitment to collaborate on trade, but, despite improvements in the agricultural sector of developing countries, agricultural subsidies in developed countries still persist. There is a commitment to collaborate on increasing the coherence and sustainability of international systems, but the development efforts from the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international financial institutions are incoherent and not concerted. There is a commitment to collaborate on financial and technical cooperation, but official development assistance (ODA) levels, as a percentage of gross national product (GNP), have

decreased, despite improved absorptive capacities in developing countries.

The Group wishes to place special emphasis on official development assistance to developing countries as indispensable in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Despite promises of an additional \$50 billion in ODA, declining numbers in 2007, along with heavy reliance on debt cancellation, which is funded with and detracts from ODA resources, are of serious concern. The forthcoming review of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Doha this year, will provide a valuable opportunity to evolve agreement on a comprehensive and effective approach to meet the resource requirements for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Furthermore, if global poverty is to fall to the levels required to reach the MDGs by 2015, global GDP growth must remain at, or exceed, current annual levels of 3.5 per cent. In addition, to ensure that all developing countries make progress, global economic growth must reach the poorest. However, a global economic slowdown that originated in the developed world foreshadows a possible recession, falling commodity prices and fluctuations in the international financial markets that threaten to cause growth to stagnate and further marginalize the poorest. It is therefore also critical for international financial institutions to increase efforts to establish adequate financial strategies for developing countries that are vulnerable to economic crises, particularly the countries in Africa, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. That can prevent a reversal of progress towards the MDGs caused by global instability.

The task of achieving the MDGs by 2015 is a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. The Group of 77 and China continues to call for concrete focus on the lack of progress on MDG 8, regarding global partnership for development. So far, developing countries' policies and practices have been systematically scrutinized, while the shortcomings in the commitments of developed countries have been weakly, if at all, emphasized, and rarely quantified. Moreover, we are concerned at ongoing efforts to alter the MDG monitoring framework midway to 2015; more so as the proposed changes only cover MDGs 1 to 7. For the world to have any chance of transforming

the current status quo of human underdevelopment, the monitoring framework must be consistent throughout the entire initiative and the burden of scrutiny must apply to all stakeholders. We therefore highlight the need to generate an intergovernmental agreement to develop a monitoring mechanism to track and promote the implementation of goals and commitments by all stakeholders; and we call for greater consistency in effectively monitoring the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Developed countries must be evaluated not only on their implementation of the Monterrey Consensus as the mechanism that ensures the resources necessary to achieve the Goals, but also on the progress made on MDG 8, for which, unfortunately, there are no clear benchmarks to monitor implementation. The Group therefore calls on the United Nations and its relevant bodies to contribute to the development of a comprehensive matrix of the commitments made under MDG 8 and specific benchmarks to facilitate the monitoring of its implementation.

Making MDG 8 work for the most vulnerable countries, and particularly for countries in Africa, is a priority concern of the Group. There seems to be no coordinated thinking or work on addressing how the potential of MDG 8 can be systematically harnessed, tracked or monitored to support development in general, and in Africa in particular. Therefore, convinced that the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs "will constitute a significant event that will review the implementation of all commitments made to and by Africa in order to comprehensively address the special development needs of the continent" (*resolution 62/242, sixth preambular paragraph*), the Group commends the holding of that important meeting, which is to take place in September of this year prior to the debate of the General Assembly's sixty-third session.

Monitoring progress on the MDGs without concrete and comprehensive progress on commitments, without consistent monitoring throughout the entire initiative and without clear benchmarks for MDG 8 is denying the essential shared responsibility among all stakeholders for the achievement of the Goals. The Group hopes that out of this discussion in the General Assembly will come renewed and invigorated efforts to close the implementation gap left by unfulfilled commitments.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Žiga Turk, Minister for Growth of Slovenia.

Mr. Turk (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

We have crossed the midpoint between the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals and the 2015 target date. The data available indicate that results have been uneven. The EU has expressed its full commitment and dedication to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on several occasions. The European Council has adopted important declarations and decisions to that effect. The reduction of poverty in the developing countries is the core overarching objective of EU development policy. The European Consensus on Development also emphasizes the EU commitment to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace, democracy, gender equality, the rule of law, solidarity and justice, and pays special attention to the needs of Africa and the least developed countries. The EU shall address development efforts more systematically also in situations of fragility and pay more attention to the "aid orphan" countries.

The EU member States and the European Commission have made efforts to better align their development cooperation policies and practices with the overall objective of poverty eradication and the achievement of the MDGs. Again in 2005, the EU committed itself to scaling up EU aid, collectively contributing 0.56 per cent gross national income (GNI) to official development assistance by 2010 and reaching the target of 0.7 per cent GNI by 2015. The EU is currently providing 57 per cent of global official development assistance. We will continue to make efforts to meet and exceed our timetables, and we invite other countries to follow suit.

The EU strongly believes that progress towards the MDGs is not just about increasing the volume of official development assistance. It is also about improving aid effectiveness. The EU believes that it is particularly important to ensure extensive progress on four key aspects of the Paris Declaration on Aid

Effectiveness, namely, division of labour among donors, predictability of aid, enhanced use of country systems and mutual accountability for development results.

However, foreign aid alone, though important, cannot deliver the MDGs. Foreign aid can only be a complement to national efforts. In that regard, more efforts are needed: national strategies should better reflect the MDGs, and the linkage between sound poverty reduction strategies and budget allocations should be strengthened. In order to achieve the MDGs, each country should take firm ownership of and responsibility for its development agenda, tailor the global MDG targets within its specific context into national targets and policies and translate these into concrete programmes and budgetary allocations.

We should also not forget that all eight MDGs are closely interlinked and that development strategies rarely target just one objective. That underlines the necessity of promoting a comprehensive approach towards sustainable development, including pro-poor economic growth and progress in democratic governance.

In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, world leaders committed themselves to sparing no efforts to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the people who suffer from poverty and hunger. Progress towards meeting that Goal has been uneven: at the global level, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from 28 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in 2005, but progress has been less pronounced in Southern Asia and, in particular, sub-Saharan Africa. Efforts to reduce the poverty should be accelerated in those regions since, with population increases, many more millions of people need to be taken out of poverty.

Likewise, malnourishment should be vigorously addressed. Climate change and the recent increase in food prices present additional challenges in the efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

The EU fully shares the broad definition of poverty encompassing various dimensions besides income, such as access to health, social services and education, gender equality, social inclusion, powerlessness and lack of voice or representation. We are aware that even in developed countries, where living conditions have been improved by economic growth, pockets of poverty and social exclusion persist,

calling for renewed efforts targeted at specific population groups.

The achievement of poverty eradication depends on the existence of integrated and mutually reinforcing social, economic and environmental national strategies and plans to achieve sustainable development with a particular focus on a pro-poor growth perspective, the creation of productive employment and decent work and the adoption of social inclusion policies. Also, in many poor countries, development of the agriculture sector should be at the centre of poverty reduction strategies, given the evidence on the sector's ability to reduce poverty and hunger. As stated in the 2005 European Consensus on Development, combating poverty will only be successful if equal importance is given to investing in people, protecting natural resources, securing rural livelihoods and investing in wealth creation.

Given the particular vulnerability of women and girls to poverty and the fact that they make up the majority of the world's poor, efforts towards creating an environment conducive to the effective integration and active participation of women in development are, therefore, imperative. We underline that comprehensive gender-sensitive policies allowing and providing for the full and equal participation of women in policy- and decision-making are needed to address the feminization of poverty and enhance their contribution to economic and social development. In order to be effective, such strategies need to be implemented through, *inter alia*, gender-sensitive budgeting.

Learning and education should be at the heart of the development agendas. MDG 2 aims at ensuring that children everywhere — boys and girls — will be able to complete good quality primary schooling. MDG 3 targets the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. While there is encouraging news on achieving universal primary education, the gender parity goal set for 2005 has not yet been achieved.

The European Union is committed to accelerating progress towards the education MDGs as a policy priority, in particular with regard to access to primary education. At the international level, the EU supports actively the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All, and its Fast-Track Initiative, in partnership with other bilateral donors for education, as well as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. EU priorities

in education are quality primary education, vocational training and addressing inequalities within holistic national sector plans. Particular attention is devoted to promoting girls' education, children with special needs, safety at school and education in fragile States.

The Millennium Declaration places health squarely at the centre of the international development agenda and champions it as a key driver of economic progress. The challenges are many: strengthening health systems is critical, as is expanding the integrated delivery and access to health services, addressing the pressing shortfall in skilled health professionals and linking access to health care with building new hospitals, good roads and reliable water supplies.

Much attention should also be given to health in fragile States and to making aid more effective and equitable. New donors and aid channels in the health sector have contributed to a sharp increase in aid for some priority diseases, but this also requires support to health systems overall, harmonization among donors and stronger alignment around national policies and plans.

In achieving MDGs 4 and 5 — reducing child mortality and improving maternal health — improvement in health of pregnant women and new mothers plays an important role in further reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. Skilled and responsive care during pregnancy, at birth and immediately afterwards all contribute to lower maternal mortality and, consequently, to reducing child mortality. Immunization of children has also proved to significantly reduce child mortality.

In 2000, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to reduce the maternal mortality rate by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015. That goal was followed in 2006 by the addition of a target for universal access to reproductive health. Despite those commitments, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are still the leading cause of death among women in developing countries. No region thus far has achieved sufficient annual declines to reach the MDG 5 target. Much more needs to be done. This issue has to be prioritized in budgets and in endeavours to overcome the lack of political will. Reaching this MDG is crucial for achieving the other MDGs.

Progress in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases — MDG 6 — has been facilitated by a substantive increase in resources provided by

international donors. The European Union would like to draw attention to the fact that HIV/AIDS remains a global scourge that requires a response at all levels through treatment, prevention, care and support in order to reach the target of universal access, in particular to antiretroviral therapy.

The EU is promoting comprehensive maternal health programmes and developing the pool of skilled birth attendants. The rates of maternal mortality or the number of skilled attendants at birth are useful indicators for assessing the functioning of health systems and our progress going forward. We will also continue to place special emphasis on access of young people in developing countries, the poorest in particular, to improved health.

The EU is also fully committed to supporting international action to address the shortage of health workers and the crisis in human resources for health in developing countries. The Commission and EU member States are developing a coordinated response through country, regional and global action.

Both health and education are integral parts of the tenth European Development Fund for the period of 2008-2013. Part of EU aid for health in developing countries is channelled through international organizations and global initiatives. The importance of progress in the areas of health and education is evident, both in their own right but also in creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and in making progress in the fight against poverty.

For several decades the development assistance community has worked with people and Governments of developing countries to help improve their living conditions. Progress, though often unrecognized, has been remarkable. In the past 30 years alone, life expectancy increased by more than 20 years. Infant mortality rates have dropped by half. Primary school enrolment has doubled. Developing countries have achieved remarkable, albeit uneven, improvements in the living standards of their people. The results are highly encouraging. They demonstrate that poverty can be overcome. But the battle is far from over.

The year 2008 is a crucial year to make progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Their achievement is still possible in most countries, but only if concerted and well-targeted actions in support of all MDGs are increased immediately and sustained until 2015. That requires a shared global strategy that fosters

inclusive sustained growth, solid context-sensitive national poverty strategies, sound governance, gender equality and empowerment of women. It also requires increased public and private investment, enhanced productive capacity and the creation of decent work, so that all development partners — Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector — can join forces in getting the MDGs back on the track to achievement.

To accelerate progress, it is also necessary to focus on sharing best practices and scaling up of models that have proven effective. As the European Union, we intend to fully play our part and will discuss how we can best contribute to efforts to put the MDGs back on track at the May General Affairs and External Relations Council and the June EU Council.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Mr. President, I would like to begin by applauding your leadership in getting us focused on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). You do so at a critical time. This is just the impetus required to bring our aims to fruition.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deserves the highest praise for continuing to highlight the main contemporary issues: development, climate change, reforms of the world body.

I speak on behalf of the least developed countries (LDCs). The group aligns itself with the statement earlier by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Within the space of our lifetime, we have witnessed great progress. There is also a flip side of the coin. It is an axiomatic truth that one quarter of the world's population live on less than a dollar a day. Although a smaller percentage of humanity survives below the poverty line, the absolute number of the poor continues to grow. When many parts of the world are undergoing economic miracles, the LDCs continue to face the structural impediments to development that have been their bane.

Unprecedented hikes in food prices disproportionately affect the poor. They have risen by 40 per cent in 2007, and the poorest households spend over 70 per cent of their income on food items. Counter-cyclical measures by development partners

have been largely absent. Global food aid has declined to 0.4 per cent of production. Food-surplus countries must come forward to ease the supply-side constraints. A massive, united global action is called for. Only then can hunger and malnutrition be prevented. Only then shall we be able to achieve the core objectives of MDG 1.

Climate change and global warming are new challenges. They constitute our current nemesis. LDCs and small island developing States, due to their resource constraints and geography, are particularly vulnerable. The threats to low-lying coastal areas are obvious. The Food and Agricultural Organization and the International Fund for Agricultural Development have warned that climate change will put an extra 50 million people at risk of hunger by 2020.

The good news is that the world is responding to the wake-up call. We worked hard at Bali. However, the document was weak. It lacked a firm commitment to emission cuts. The sacrosanct principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" suffered a setback. I am pleased that Bangladesh was active as Chair of the LDCs. Our combined efforts led to the establishment of the Adaptation Fund Board, which, we hope, will facilitate equitable allocation for the purpose, and technology transfers.

If an agreement has to be reached by 2009, the discourse must be depoliticized. Developed countries must make unilateral, meaningful and unconditional commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The post-2012 agreement must recognize the special and compelling needs of vulnerable countries, such as the least developed countries. We would strongly urge the setting up of a technology transfer board to assist them.

Africa continues to be relentlessly subjected to the scourges of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The lack of financial resources and trained health workers remains a key constraint to achieving their related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The unpredictability of external resources renders the scaling-up of health-care services difficult. Fulfilment of MDG 8 is a categorical imperative.

For many countries, the targets of universal primary education and gender parity remain huge challenges. Seventy-two million primary age children remain out of school; 58 of the 86 countries that have not reached universal primary education will not

achieve it by 2015. It is estimated that \$10 billion will be required for it. That amount will be hard to come by.

However, the focus on least developed countries is starting to pay off, albeit slowly, even painfully, but surely. Reform measures to promote good governance, democracy, human rights and transparency are in place. Development is possible only against such a matrix. Ideas such as micro-credit and non-formal education are empowering women and children. Many have decentralized administration and strengthened local Government.

My own country, Bangladesh, is a case in point, yet, sadly, the least developed countries remain at the bottom of the pyramid. Promises of external resources remain elusive. Market access remains blocked. Where it is given, supply-side constraints dilute it. So, to move from rhetoric to action, we suggest five points.

First, developed countries must fulfil the official development assistance commitment of 0.2 per cent of gross national income for least developed countries by 2010. Secondly, all the external debts of least developed countries must be cancelled forthwith without discrimination or conditionalities. Thirdly, developed countries and developing ones in a position to do so must provide quota-free and duty-free access to all the products of all the least developed countries. Fourthly, preferential and more favourable treatment for service providers of the least developed countries must be accorded, particularly on the movement of natural persons under Mode IV of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Finally, there must be a new international financial structure allowing the least developed countries to borrow against their own reserves.

We have only one world to live in, but our own actions put it at risk. We must learn to protect it in every possible way. We must recognize that the alleviation of the pains of some is the responsibility of all. That awareness sets our times apart from others in history. Is that too tall an order? We do not think so. After all, has it not been aptly said that humankind's reach should exceed its grasp? What else are the heavens for?

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ranko Škrbić, Minister of Health of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Škrbić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Having the opportunity to address this body on behalf of my entity is a great honour.

Systematic assessment of the progress and success of planned objectives, based on evidence, is an essential element of all programmes and activities directed at health promotion and disease prevention among vulnerable and underserved populations.

A multiple indicator cluster survey conducted in 2000 and 2006 by the Republika Srpska's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Public Health Institute and Agencies for Statistics, supported by UNICEF; and the British Government's Department for International Development was based in large part on the need to monitor progress towards goals and targets emanating from recent international agreements — the Millennium Declaration, adopted by all 191 United Nations Member States in September 2000, and the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children", adopted by 189 Member States at the United Nations special session on children in May 2002. Both of those commitments build upon promises made by the international community at the 1990 World Summit for Children. In signing those international agreements, Governments committed themselves to improving conditions for their children and to monitoring progress towards that end. UNICEF was assigned a supporting role in that task.

The 2006 multiple indicator cluster survey had as its primary objectives, first, to provide up-to-date information for assessing the situation of children and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina; secondly, to furnish data needed for monitoring progress towards objectives established by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the goals of "A world fit for children" as a basis for future action; and thirdly, to contribute to the improvement of data collection and monitoring systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to strengthen technical expertise in the design, implementation and analysis of such systems.

The survey provided 90 indicators related to nutrition, child health, the environment, reproductive health, child development, education, child protection, HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, orphans and vulnerable children.

Let me provide some interesting figures. The prevalence of children under the age of 5 who are

underweight is just 0.4 per cent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the coverage for measles vaccine is 75 per cent. Cooking with solid fuels — biomass or coal — leads to high levels of indoor pollution and is a major cause of ill health in the world, particularly among children under 5, in the form of acute respiratory illness. Overall, 48.7 per cent of all households in Bosnia and Herzegovina use solid fuels. Nearly 99 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and 93 per cent is living in households with safe sewage. The prevalence of households in poor areas is 15.8 per cent. The current use of contraception was reported by 35.7 per cent of women currently married or in a union. Doctor-, nurse- or midwife-assisted deliveries accounted for nearly 100 per cent of the births that occurred in the year prior to the survey.

With respect to education, nearly 99 per cent of children of primary school age are attending primary school. All children who enter the first grade of primary school reach grade five. The prevalence of primary school completion is 86.6 per cent. The ratio of girls to boys attending primary and secondary education shows that gender parity for primary and secondary school is close to 1. The vast majority of the adult population — 99.6 per cent — is literate.

Approximately 34 per cent of young women in Bosnia and Herzegovina know all three of the main ways to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission. Condoms are used by 71 per cent of women while having sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner.

One of the overarching goals of the MDGs and "A world fit for children" is to reduce infant mortality. The rate of infant mortality and the rate of stillbirths in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown a declining trend in recent years. In 1996, the infant mortality rate was 14.6 per 1,000, and in 2005 it was 3.4 per 1,000. In 1996, the stillbirth rate was 12.4 per 1,000 and in 2005 it was just 3.4 per 1,000. Despite the fact that those stillbirth rate figures were actually derived on the basis of an estimated size of the population, and that those rates may be higher by several units per 1,000 if the size of the population is overestimated, the declining trend is still significant and indicates a very significant improvement.

Our country has achieved significant progress in the domain of stewardship thanks to the efforts that have been invested in producing and implementing

policies, health-care development strategies and normative legal regulations. The recently appointed ministerial conference on health in Bosnia and Herzegovina, consisting of the Ministries of Health of Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Brcko district, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a positive example of main governmental involvement in the multi-party effort to stride forward in the coordination of health strategy planning and implementing activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The notably unfavourable demographic trend — the constant diminution of national growth rate — will have significant consequences with regard to the structure and volume of labour in the future. It also affects the health of the population in terms of the epidemiological transition associated with population ageing and contributes to an increased incidence and prevalence of malignant and chronic degenerative illnesses. This trend requires the preparedness of the health system to respond to the changing health of the population. It is also to be expected that there will be an increasing number of persons living with HIV/AIDS and multi-resistant tuberculosis, which will increase pressure on public health functions.

Development of democracy and an emphasis on the individual rights of community members, which, in terms of health care, can be interpreted as a better opportunity for a service user to choose, will bring about both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities imply a more active involvement of community members in decision-making in health, which at the same time requires a better responsiveness of the health system, and this, in turn, implies the provision of higher-quality health services. Changes in the law governing health services and social services will enhance the participation and contribution of local communities' governing bodies in the allocation of resources and the initiation of services at their own level.

Legal and regulatory changes in the European Union require a full readiness to swiftly respond to ecological and public health challenges, which calls for a state of preparedness requiring large investments. As a result of sociocultural changes, the public is slightly better informed and places higher demands on the health system. However, these changes have also undermined the structure of the family and led to an increased frequency of various forms of risky

behaviour, such as unhealthy food, reduced physical activity, diverse forms of addiction and so on. Sociocultural changes are also the major cause of unfavourable demographic trends. Low fertility rates in the population is a situation that no developed society has managed to escape.

These factors exert pressure on the institutions of marriage and family, as do ideas of personal freedom, the consumer mentality, hedonism and non-traditional lifestyles. Like all contemporary societies, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces many structural challenges, including unemployment, housing issues and day care for children. Yet, although we live in a contemporary society, how is it possible that the number of newborns is so low when studies show that only 9.4 per cent of the women of reproductive age who are either married or living with a partner use any of the modern methods of contraception? Is it possible that the predominant method of family planning is abortion? The concept of freedom of the individual is essentially well intentioned but every one of us should start thinking about Jeremy Bentham's question — to what extent does my freedom limit the freedom of another?

The monitoring of population development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the starting points for designing quality strategic plans for health, education and social welfare. A highly overdue census will constitute a starting point for comprehensive analyses of demographic indicators and for laying quality foundations for a population policy.

Some consider that the major reduction in the number of children being born in the regions of South-Eastern Europe offers an opportunity to provide better prospects for young people in the coming years. The cost of investing in the young generation is not directly proportional to the number of young people, and a sharp decline in the number of newborns does not justify inadequate investment in health, education and other areas that are vitally important to the development of young people and therefore to society.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Majlinda Bregu, Minister of European Integration of Albania.

Mrs. Bregu (Albania): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Albania, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to brief this august body on the progress made in our accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and on

the challenges that remain. I am confident that this event will be a useful learning experience for us all. I would like to extend our thanks to the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting and for bringing about this exchange of views and experiences.

Albania fully aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. On behalf of my country, I would like to make some further additional remarks. They will comply with the time limits, and a longer version of this statement will be circulated to all delegations.

The achievement of the MDGs, led by the National Strategy for Development and Integration, together with the National Plan for the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, is our main objective.

The achievement of the MDGs remains the focus of my country's development agenda. We believe that development is a priority and an objective in and of itself. We also highly appreciate the importance of partnership in development. Developed and developing countries face the common and urgent responsibility to transform this partnership into a success story. Thus I am happy to state that Albania is currently an active and credible partner in global cooperation in this area.

Albania is undertaking a unique exercise in terms of making use of the MDGs, not only as a framework but also as a tool for development. We have adapted the global MDGs to our own domestic requirements, taking into consideration not only the local needs but also regional perspectives. Albania is probably the only country where the MDGs have been used to promote local development through regional development strategies, while improved governance, set as Albania's ninth goal, is being considered not only as a goal in itself but also as a major precondition for the achievement of all the other MDGs and for European Union integration.

The main purpose of our subnational reports was to explore and demonstrate how the MDGs could be used to build support for momentum from the bottom up, to assess local poverty challenges and to serve as an engine for comprehensive local development. Albania has succeeded in including the adapted MDGs in the National Strategy for Development and Integration, our main strategic document.

During 2007, the Albanian economy displayed a positive trend towards economic growth, which is forecasted to be at 6 per cent, macroeconomic stability and deepening of structural reforms oriented towards a more efficient economy. With regard to the fight against poverty, economic growth remains the key instrument for improving the living conditions of the population and therefore for the elimination of poverty. Economic indicators related to macroeconomic policies, assessments and predictions suggest that the rate of economic growth for 2009 to 2011 will be 6 per cent, rising to 6.5 per cent in 2009 and 7 per cent in the two following years. The rate of inflation for this period is expected to stay at or under the targeted level of 3 per cent.

With respect to education, consistent with the MDGs, the National Strategy for Development and Integration targets an adult literacy rate of 100 per cent, a rate of completion of 9 years education of 100 per cent, a rate of completion of higher education of 90 per cent, and an impressive increase in the average number of years of schooling from 9 to 13.5 years.

Public expenditures on education in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) declined from 3.75 per cent in 1995 to 3.1 per cent in 2004, but today they are up again at 3.6 per cent. This figure is still very low by comparison with the countries of the European Union, where it is 4.9 per cent, or with the West Balkan countries, where it is a little over 4 per cent. But the budget for our education system, which in 2004 represented only 2.4 per cent of GDP, in 2008 will be 4 per cent of GDP, thus even meeting the target set for 2009.

Different programmes have been introduced in the education system in Albania, such as e-school programmes that will connect public primary and high schools to the Internet and equip them with networked computer labs.

Investments in higher education have also increased. Through the complete liberalization of universities, the introduction of new branches and the opening of new universities, the number of students has doubled over the span of two years. Albania is reported to have 100,000 students attending public and private universities, as compared to 52,000 in 2004. In addition, a Fund for Excellency was established, and several other projects important for the modernization of our education system are supported. Our main goal

is that, by the end of 2009, the education budget would represent 5 per cent of gross domestic product, double the 2005 figure.

In the health sector, the main goal is to improve the quality of and accessibility to health services through achieving the objectives in improving the quality and equity of access to essential health-care services and strengthening sector stewardship and measures to ensure fiscal sustainability. In line with the MDGs, the National Strategy for Development and Integration sets a challenging target: a reduction in maternal mortality of 10 per 100,000 and 10 per 100,000 in child mortality by 2015. To achieve those objectives, priority is given to reforms in the health sector, particularly in public health measures and preventive care, and to the amelioration of access to and quality of the health financing system.

Albania's 2008 budget defines an increase of 60 per cent in investments in the health-care system, and we will conduct a policy of salary increases towards doubling nurses' salaries and a significant increase for physicians. In addition, reconstruction of some 13 clinics and hospitals in various districts is expected for 2008, along with construction of five new health-care centres. Eighteen per cent of the budget will be used for their equipment.

The practical implementation of a new national action plan on the MDGs, combined with innovative financing mechanisms, shows that their fulfilment represents a great opportunity for the Albanian people to ensure stable development and better governance. Although Albania is advanced in terms of using the MDGs as an effective means to promote human development, a number of challenges remain to be addressed, including the following.

First, the implementation of regional development strategies requires major efforts from local government, but also from the central Government, civil society and the donor community. Transferring more resources and increasing the capacities of local government in line with the decentralization reforms of the Government of Albania is very important. In addition, linking the MDGs regional development strategies with an integrated planning system seems to be crucial for increasing MDGs financing.

Secondly, efforts have been made to further integrate the MDGs with the EU social inclusion

approach. However, more efforts are needed to tailor the MDGs to take into consideration the Albanian EU integration perspective in terms of social inclusion.

Thirdly, efforts to monitor and report on progress towards the achievement of the MDGs should be made at several levels. First, at the domestic level, local and central government should track the progress towards MDG achievement, and we are aware of that. Monitoring and reporting on MDGs would increase political accountability and reduce speculations in the political "market". The development of a good statistical base is a key factor for MDG monitoring.

Let me conclude by underlining some factors of importance. We must not forget that all the MDGs are highly interlinked. It is crucial for Governments, in their efforts to succeed in achieving the MDGs, to come up with well-balanced and integrated development strategies. We embrace the opinion that the right allocation and use of national development resources, coordinated international aid and promotion of the process of sharing best practices in the field are key factors for achieving the MDGs.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Chhay Than, Minister of Planning of Cambodia.

Mr. Than (Cambodia): Today, it is my great pleasure and honour to attend the General Assembly's thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to make a statement on behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

During the last decade, with the strengthening of peace, stability, national unification, democracy and respect for human rights, our gross domestic product (GDP) growth was an average of 10.6 per cent between 2003 and 2006 and 10.1 per cent in 2007. Cambodia doubled its per capita GDP to \$586 in 2007. We are aware that the very narrow base of economic growth in Cambodia, driven mainly by certain urban sectors, is the main cause of increasing inequality between urban and rural areas.

To implement the Rome Declaration on Harmonization, the Royal Government of Cambodia has decided to prepare a single national strategic development plan for 2006 to 2010, which will serve as a framework for aligning all activities supported by official development assistance. The Royal Government stands strongly committed to achieving

the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals by adopting their goals and targets as the key pillars of Cambodia's national development policy and strategy.

Cambodia's present performance in relation to the Cambodian MDGs is mixed and uneven. There have been significant reductions in poverty rates — 4.6 per cent in urban areas, especially in the Phnom Penh municipality, and 20.5 per cent in more accessible rural areas. Primary education has expanded to more children. There has been a significant reduction in mortality rates for both infants and children under five years of age to 66 and 83 per 1,000 live births, respectively — but those rates are still very high. Rates of immunization against major childhood diseases and of breastfeeding have improved, and gender disparity in most areas has been reduced, especially in primary education. Adult literacy and wage employment in agriculture and industry have improved. There has been a reduction of communicable diseases, especially in the adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS, which has decreased to 0.60 per cent, and urban access to safe water and rural access to better sanitation have improved.

In parallel with those achievements, there are still many shortcomings and challenges that Cambodia must overcome to realize the agreed goals and targets.

First, the country's high rural poverty rate of 39 per cent and its rural economy and living standards are still worrying challenges, along with the weakness of the economic infrastructure.

Secondly, there is limited progress in achieving the goals of universal nine-year basic education, particularly beyond primary education. The lack of skilled workers is already a severe constraint to accelerating growth in both rural and urban areas.

Thirdly, there is limited access to quality health services, especially in the area of women's and maternal health. Information from the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey showed a very high maternal mortality ratio of 472 per 100,000 live births.

The Royal Government of Cambodia recognizes that those achievements can be made because of generous contributions from all of Cambodia's cooperation partners. They also reflect the gradual improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the utilization of the various kinds of cooperation financing that Cambodia has received from its external

cooperation partners. On this rare and auspicious occasion, on behalf of the Royal Government and the people of Cambodia, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of our development partners for their invaluable and noble contribution to poverty reduction and development in Cambodia.

Cambodia's progress towards achieving the Cambodian MDGs is constrained by a chronic shortage of investment to meet its priority requirements. Cambodia's national MDG strategy must be complemented by financial, technical and other support from its development partners and the global community. A collective effort is the key to achieving the Cambodian MDGs and ensuring sustainable growth and stability in Cambodia. In closing, let me thank the Assembly for all its patience and attention.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Denis Lowe, Minister of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development of Barbados.

Mr. Lowe (Barbados): I am pleased to be delivering this statement on behalf of my country, Barbados. We align ourselves with the statement made earlier by the Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. However, I would like to make this complementary statement to provide information on what has been undertaken by Barbados at the national level.

I join with fellow representatives in congratulating you, Sir, on your efficient leadership of the General Assembly. The Barbados delegation also commends you for the timeliness in the hosting of this thematic debate, which is being convened against the backdrop of high energy costs, the ravaging effects of climate change, and food insecurity. Those emerging challenges are threatening to derail what progress has been made by some countries in attaining the development targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and are exacerbating the difficulties already faced by those who are struggling to do so.

In January 2008, Barbadians elected a new Government to manage their affairs. As a representative of that new Government, I want to assure this body of our continued commitment to Barbados' full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As has been reported from time to time in similar forums, Barbados has exhibited a relatively good track record regarding the

achievement of many of the Millennium Development Goals and, as a consequence, we are in a position to pursue an MDG-plus strategy in some areas. Permit me to share an overview of some of the achievements and challenges faced in pursuing and maintaining the effort. Let us first look at the question of poverty.

Barbados continues to believe that no goal is more critical to the achievement of global development than the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Fortunately, extreme poverty and hunger do not exist in Barbados. Nevertheless, we are aware that there are pockets of poverty present, especially within the urban corridor, that must engage our attention. Over time, we have implemented a number of policies and programmes and established a number of institutions to assist us in doing so.

Indicators such as reduced welfare rolls, reduced unemployment and an enhanced culture of entrepreneurship suggest that those policies and programmes have brought some measure of success. However, there is a need for a full evaluation of their impact, and that will shortly be undertaken through the planned country poverty assessment, which will commence in approximately two months. In another 18 months, we will also be publishing our country's first national human development report, which will provide some data on the attainment of some of the targets linked to the Millennium Development Goals.

My Government is conscious of the fact that the pace of poverty eradication needs to be increased. To that end, we are embarking on a programme of constituency empowerment, which will involve the establishment of constituency councils and constituency empowerment centres. That will be part of a comprehensive programme that will include the provision of safety nets for those in need of such provisioning, but has as its goal the ultimate empowerment of individuals and communities alike. It will provide a pathway to progress that is seamless, as the various agencies involved in social service delivery will be operating within an institutional framework aimed at motivating the most vulnerable among us to move from a position of powerlessness to one of interdependence in which they will be able to make a meaningful contribution to national development.

Education has been at the centre of Barbados' social and economic development strategy for many years. That accounts for the country's achievement of

universal access to primary education and the fact that education is compulsory up to age 16. As such, Barbados has met the targets identified in Millennium Development Goal 2. In that regard, we are well on the way in pursuing an MDG-plus mandate in that area. For example, there is universal access to secondary education, tuition-free post-secondary education and, more recently, the commitment of the Government to achieving universal pre-primary education for children between the ages of three and five. Several nursery schools have already been established in the island, some by the State and others in partnership with the private sector.

Good health is viewed as a human right in Barbados. Thus, for many years there has been universal access to health care. As a consequence, child mortality rates are below global levels and Barbados' maternal mortality rate is one of the lowest in the Caribbean region at 0.9 per 1,000.

Unfortunately, we are still struggling with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that approximately 1.8 per cent of Barbados' population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Of concern is the age group 15-49, which the pandemic has impacted the most. Nevertheless, word coming from the National HIV/AIDS Commission recently indicates that there are signs of behavioural change among that segment of the population. Also encouraging is the increasing number of persons coming forward to be voluntarily tested at the various health fairs across the island and the health tents that have been set up with some frequency in strategic places across the country under the auspices of various coalitions formed to assist in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

There has been a tendency within the international community to be lukewarm, to say the least, in addressing the needs of countries that are MDG-plus. That is compounded when such countries happen to be small island developing States, which bring their own peculiarities and vulnerabilities to the table, as in the case of Barbados. Their needs are not being adequately addressed through the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development, nor is full cooperation being received from the international community or resources committed to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted in 1994, and the subsequent Mauritius Strategy of 2005.

We therefore call for the forging of stronger development partnerships among member States in both North-South and South-South cooperation. In addition, the private sector, particularly companies and organizations operating in the North, should be called upon to support the efforts of developing countries. In other words, the MDGs cannot be fully achieved without the full operationalization of MDG 8. In these challenging times, we have no option.

We are all duty-bound to join together in doubling our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. They provide us with an excellent framework in which sustained development can be pursued. I urge that we assist each other during the journey towards their achievement.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Al Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express to you, Mr. President, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates delegation, our deep gratitude and appreciation for the convening of this important meeting and for your efforts in directing it. We wish you every success and the best of outcomes.

We were hoping that, since more than half the time set to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has lapsed, we would have been more than halfway towards achieving those Goals. But the last report on the MDGs indicates that the progress achieved in the three major areas has been slower than expected. Moreover, there are still numerous challenges facing a number of developing countries, mainly in Africa. All of this threatens to delay the achievement of the Goals until after 2015.

The United Arab Emirates is firmly convinced that the eradication of poverty and hunger is a major step towards supporting and maintaining peace and security in the world. We recognize that succeeding in overcoming these challenges undoubtedly requires a strong global partnership in which the developed, developing and poor countries assume their responsibilities, as agreed in the Millennium Declaration and at other conferences and forums on development, in particular the Monterrey Consensus.

In this regard, we urge developed countries to fulfil their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of gross

national income to official development assistance for developing countries and to alleviate or even cancel their debts. We stress the importance of giving developing countries the opportunity to participate in the global market in a just and equitable manner and of providing them with up-to-date technical assistance to enable them to build their human capacities, develop their societies, mobilize their national resources and attract foreign direct investment in order to achieve their development goals.

In the meantime, we urge developing countries to adopt economic policies that are income-generating and conducive to production. By doing so, they will create an appropriate national environment to attract foreign direct investment. They should also support and energize the private sector.

My country has an outstanding record with respect to achieving the MDGs and dealing with typical economic challenges facing developing countries. In a very short period, we have secured some significant achievements. We have succeeded in consolidating political and social security through the adoption of policies that focused primarily on the development of human capital. We succeeded by investing our oil revenues — the main source of our national income — in such a way as to diversify and expand the production base and the sources of national income, emphasizing industry, commerce, agriculture, tourism and services. In addition, we pursued free-market policies and provided incentives to stimulate the private sector and create a suitable environment for attracting foreign direct investment.

With this rational economic policy, we succeeded in eradicating poverty completely and raising the average per capita income to the highest level in the Middle East and one of the highest in the world.

In the meantime, we were able to lower the percentage of people with a very low income level to less than 1 per cent of the total number of families. Our present goal is to maintain this high standard of living and enhance it.

As regards the goal of universal primary education, our country recognizes the importance of education in achieving human development, national security and stability. Accordingly, we have supported compulsory primary education for all free of charge, raising the percentage of enrolment for capable children of both sexes in elementary schools to 89 per

cent. It is forecasted that we will reach 100-per-cent enrolment before 2015.

We were able to reduce the childhood mortality rate by two thirds by developing and improving the health-care sector, especially in areas such as maternal and childcare. Here, we succeeded in reducing the under-five mortality rate to 9.4 per 1,000. We expect to reduce it further to 6.5 per 1,000 by 2015.

It is estimated that 94 per cent of children have been immunized against childhood diseases. We expect to reach 100-per-cent immunization by 2015. In the meantime, we have been able to reduce the post-natal mortality rate by 86 per cent, as against the required rate of 75 per cent. Furthermore, 100 per cent of the births in the Emirates are attended by skilled health personnel.

As to the eradication of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, the United Arab Emirates has the lowest HIV prevalence in the world. In 2002, it was declared free of malaria, while the programme to combat tuberculosis was successful in reducing the rate of tuberculosis deaths to less than 1 per cent, that is, to 0.46 per cent.

My country has been an effective and active partner in the global partnership for development and the achievement of the MDGs, through its commitment to implementing the recommendations of conferences on development and its effective contributions to United Nations agencies and international and regional institutions concerned with development assistance. We also participate directly in the implementation of development programmes in developing countries.

My country contributes 3.6 per cent of its gross national product for development assistance to developing countries, assistance which is put towards combating diseases, building hospitals and supporting education. Moreover, private initiatives are undertaken to provide necessary financing for specific programmes, including the "Dubai Cares" campaign launched in 2007 to provide basic education for one million children in developing countries, especially in Africa.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that we will be able, thanks to this meeting, to take stock of how far we have come in implementing the MDGs, to pinpoint any problems or obstacles that stand in the

way of the full and timely achievement of those Goals and to identify practical means of reaching them.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Iryna Kryuchkova, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine.

Ms. Kryuchkova (Ukraine) (spoke in Russian): I wish first to align my delegation with the statement made by the delegation of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union and then to touch on some issues that are of particular importance for our country.

Ukraine was one of the first countries in the post-Soviet space to respond to the initiative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to subscribe to the Millennium Declaration. In 2003, the Government began to adapt the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and drafted the first national report, "MDGs Ukraine". Then it established two further reports — "MDGs Ukraine 2000+5" and, most recently, "MDGs Ukraine 2000+7". Those reports provided data on social and economic development in Ukraine midway to 2015, the deadline for achieving the MDGs.

Ukraine is currently at the stage where national agreement must be reached and it must craft a long-term development strategy on the basis of the MDGs. The main areas of activity on the road to attaining the MDGs include building institutional capacity for the design of poverty reduction policies, carrying out socio-economic policies oriented to the MDGs, establishing a transparent system for monitoring achievement of the MDGs for the public, integrating MDG goals, objectives and indicators in the planning and programming documents of the State planning system, and incorporating the MDGs in national and local development strategies.

Adapting the MDGs for Ukraine consists in establishing at the national level six goals, each with 13 activities and 33 appropriate indicators with which to monitor success in attaining the goals each year. We have set the following national development goals for Ukraine: poverty reduction, providing life-long education of high quality, achieving sustainable development of the environment, improving maternal health and reducing infant mortality, limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis and reducing their scale, and ensuring gender equality.

The matrix of activities and indicators for the national MDGs is based on the concept of human

development and covers the surveying and monitoring of the living standards of the population and the quality of social services provided over the long term. The Ministry of the Economy, which bears the chief responsibility for coordinating the preparation of strategies and programmes, ensures that MDG activities and indicators are reflected in governmental decisions pertaining to economic and social policy.

The new Government, headed by Mrs. Yulia Tymoshenko, the Prime Minister, has developed a programme called "Ukrainian breakthrough", which has been in place for 100 days already. Its priority areas include reducing poverty, closing income gaps and raising social standards in general. The Government has also developed a medium-term programme to improve Ukraine's competitiveness in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic integration up to 2015. We expect its implementation will provide us with the necessary resources to meet our MDG commitments.

I wish now to speak about the stage we have reached in our implementation of the MDG activities. For the first goal, overcoming poverty, we have established two objectives. We plan to halve the number of people living on less than \$4.30 a day — in terms of purchasing power parity — by reducing the percentage from 11.9 in 2000 to 5.5 in 2015. We also intend to reduce the number of people living below the nationally defined poverty line by one third, from 27.2 per cent in 2001 to 18.4 per cent in 2015.

With regard to the first objective, we have already had some success. Currently, only 1 per cent of our population is living on less than \$4.30 a day in terms of purchasing power parity. However, the poverty level as defined by our national criteria is set at 75 per cent of median income, and the same number of people live below it as did in 2001. That fact is a result of constantly improving living standards, which in turn causes the median income level of the population to rise. Thus over the past four years, real income has increased 1.8 times, simultaneously causing the national criteria for poverty to be upgraded.

To make a breakthrough in this area, the Government decided to increase the minimum old-age pension to the minimum subsistence level for the unemployed. That measure went into effect on 1 April — yesterday. The minimum wage will be at the

subsistence level for the working population as of 1 January 2009. There is an improvement in social provisions for families with children, particularly where births are concerned. There are also improvements in the many other subsistence-based indicators.

Government policy is aimed at increasing the income of the poorest population groups, thereby helping to reduce polarization due to income gaps. At the same time, it addresses the problem of poverty among families with children.

The second goal is to provide life-long education of high quality. Traditionally, Ukraine has been characterized by a high level of education and by the competitiveness of its labour force. We are endeavouring to have higher education in Ukraine be more in line with the requirements of young people and the labour market. When Ukraine joined the Bologna Process in May 2005, it had to reshape its system of higher education in order to meet international requirements. With regard to education in general, we are following the policy agenda set. Currently, the Government is seeking to harmonize its education standards with those that apply in Europe.

The third goal is to ensure sustainable development of the environment. Thanks to structural changes in the economy in recent years, together with improvements in the mechanisms governing the environment, we have seen a relative stabilization in the environmental situation in Ukraine. The process of introducing the Kyoto Protocol machinery is under way. However, we still lag behind in a number of areas and with respect to two objectives.

The first of those objectives is to increase the proportion of the population with access to clean water from 86 per cent to 93 per cent in towns and from 63 per cent to 72 per cent in villages. Progress in that area is still very modest. The second objective is to stabilize air pollution from static sources. The volume of harmful emissions in the atmosphere is not expected to increase, despite economic growth, or to exceed 4.1 million tons per year. The Government's programme is aimed at tightening environmental standards and decisively improving environmental management. We hope to attain those objectives by 2015.

The fourth goal is to improve maternal health and reduce infant mortality. Maternal mortality in Ukraine has been declining since 1995. It was 24.7 per 100,000

live births in 2000, compared to 11.5 in 2006. Infant mortality has also declined: it ranged between 14.9 and 14.7 per 1,000 live births between 1993 and 1995 and declined to 9.8 by 2006. There has been similar progress with regard to the mortality for children under five.

The Government has put in place a system to assist young families, solve their housing problems and help single mothers and newborn infants. In addition, we have reorganized our maternity clinics and provided wards with resuscitation equipment for newborns weighing less than one kilogram. The Government has drawn up and is implementing a number of targeted programmes to reduce infant and maternal mortality, and we hope to make significant progress in that area.

Our fifth goal is combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Unfortunately, Ukraine has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection in Europe. Each year the number of HIV cases is growing. There were 13,800 cases in 2005 and 16,100 in 2006.

Even though in 2006 the prevalence rate for tuberculosis fell by 1 per cent in Ukraine and the death rate from tuberculosis dropped by 12.2 per cent, the situation is still far from satisfactory. Over the past 15 years the incidence of the disease has increased 2.4 times and the mortality rate 2.7 times. The Government is currently developing a number of targeted programmes to address those problems, but we still need international assistance in this area.

The sixth goal is to ensure gender equality. On 8 September 2005, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men. In 2006, unemployment among women was 1.5 times higher than among men. Also in 2006, the average wage for women was 72.8 per cent that of men, compared with 70.9 per cent in 2005, so there has been some improvement there. We have also seen improved female representation in central and local organs of executive power and the upper chamber of the Ukrainian Parliament.

Countries can achieve their development goals provided that Government, the private sector and civil society join efforts and that economic competitiveness and public-private cooperation in seeking to achieve them are enhanced. We must also find common ways to meet new challenges to global society.

I also wish to note that Ukraine supports the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Richard Konteh, Deputy Minister of Finance and Development of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Konteh (Sierra Leone): Allow me to express my Government's sincere appreciation to you, Sir, for organizing this high-level thematic debate on recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

My country aligns itself with the statement made by the Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I wish to further reiterate my delegation's appreciation for the Secretary-General's foresight and initiative in establishing the MDG Africa Steering Group, which focuses on developing synergies aimed at helping Africa to attain the targets of the MDGs within the remaining years.

Addressing the MDGs continues to be a major preoccupation for a country like Sierra Leone, which has recently emerged from over 11 years of devastating civil war. Sierra Leone continues to rank at the bottom of the Human Development Index with high levels of poverty, maternal, child and infant mortality, and illiteracy rates. Even though we take pride as a nation in the positive gains we have achieved in deepening democracy and good governance, our fragile democracy is further threatened by the global increase in fuel and food prices.

Government's priority in the short to medium term is therefore mainly focused on the provision of energy as a vehicle for economic growth and development; the provision of safe and accessible potable water supplies; revitalizing agricultural production and productivity to meet the basic food needs of the population; improved and affordable health service delivery; increased access to education for all, with special emphasis on the girl child; improved infrastructural development; public sector reforms and capacity-building for the civil service; and youth empowerment and employment creation.

In order to achieve the aforementioned, Government in 2005 developed a poverty reduction strategy with support from development partners. The

strategy was overly weighted towards reducing poverty, with very little if any emphasis placed on promoting growth. That explains why the second-generation poverty reduction strategy now lays emphasis on growth and poverty eradication.

Government recognizes the significant role that the private sector could play as a catalyst for growth. Government cannot do it alone. The aim therefore is to promote public-private partnership. It is rather unfortunate, though, that the private sector in Sierra Leone is currently very weak. Every effort must therefore be put into strengthening the private sector. All that notwithstanding, Sierra Leone has achieved some success in reaching the MDGs, although we still do not think we can achieve the MDGs by 2015.

We reduced under-five mortality rates from about 327 per 1,000 in 1985 to about 194 per 1,000 in 2004. We reduced maternal mortality rates from about 700 per 100,000 in 1990 to about 495 per 100,000 in 2005. The population using improved water sources rated at 57 per cent in 2004, while those using improved sanitation rated at about 39 per cent. Official development assistance as a percentage of gross domestic product rose from 9.1 in 1990 to 28.8 in 2005, and net foreign direct investment inflows as a percentage of gross domestic product dropped from 5 in 1992 to 4.9 in 2005.

In the area of education, primary school attendance has increased substantially over the past five years, with the net primary school attendance rate rising to 69 per cent. The gender disparity index shows an encouraging trend, with the gap between boys and girls steadily narrowing.

There are, however, a number of challenges which Sierra Leone continues to face as we combat those daunting problems in our quest to achieve the MDGs. Among them are rapidly increasing oil prices; increasing prices of food commodities, especially our staple food, rice; unpredictable and short-term aid flows that make planning for development difficult; lack of ownership of the development agenda by national Governments; and generic conditionalities set for developing countries irrespective of their status of development.

In terms of our way forward and in order to get things back on track, Government has put in place a number of measures, among which are the development of a second-generation poverty reduction

strategy paper that will focus on growth and poverty reduction; the preparation of a longer-term 10-year strategic national development plan; the launching of a national strategy for the development of statistics, which we believe will help to give us more up-to-date and reliable data to be able to monitor our development progress; the development of sectoral strategic plans for various sectors — including agriculture, health, mining, education and even finance — that will feed into the second poverty reduction strategy paper and the strategic national development plan; improved domestic revenue generation and public financial management; the creation of an enabling environment for trade and development; investment in people through capacity-building; investment in health and education programmes; a comprehensive approach to development; public-private partnership and partnership with the broader civil society; the promotion of small- and medium-scale enterprises; and attitudinal change, which is a major hallmark of our President's vision for development.

In conclusion, we believe that the monitoring and evaluation of our overall progress towards achieving the MDGs is very critical, as it would help promote not only accountability, but also transparency and coordination. My Government has therefore put in place a robust technical team drawn from all the ministries, departments and agencies and the donor community to track implementation within the broader framework of our programmes under the poverty reduction strategy paper. Also, the statistical capacity of our ministries, departments and agencies is being strengthened to provide the clarity with which poverty reduction can be monitored, as well as to track poverty-related expenditures.

In closing, Sierra Leone cannot, however, achieve the MDGs without the requisite financial and technical support. Government on its part is putting in place measures to ensure better leadership and ownership in fulfilling our development agenda. We therefore call on all our development partners, bilateral and multilateral alike, to increase aid to Sierra Leone to complement Government's efforts. What we need in Sierra Leone is official development assistance, not assistance that comes very late.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bounkeut Sangsomsak, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sangsomsak (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, I should like to commend you, Sir, for taking the initiative to convene this important and timely meeting, which will help us to address the constraints and challenges we face in leading up to 2015.

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the groups of least developed and landlocked developing countries.

As we approach the halfway point of achieving our ultimate objective by 2015, there has been concrete and significant progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals — but it is still far from satisfactory. Our panel discussion yesterday reflected the fact that much more needs to be done if we are to achieve our goals. It is clear that our great diversity is characterized by uneven distribution of wealth, at both the regional and the international levels and between countries and regions alike.

Since their adoption in 2000, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has attached great importance to the effective implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. To that end, the Millennium Development Goals have been tailored and incorporated into our national poverty eradication policy and our five-year national socio-economic development plan, which constitutes the Government's strategy to achieve sustainable poverty eradication through accelerated economic growth. It gives priority to the 47 districts identified as the poorest in the country, with a view to ensuring their progressive integration into the national economy. As a road map to achieving the MDGs, the national five-year socio-economic development plan is implemented through 11 programmes that break down into 111 concrete projects to be carried out at the central and local levels.

Given the importance of the MDGs, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has set up a national monitoring committee on the implementation of Millennium Development Goals that is mandated to promote and coordinate nationwide implementation of the MDGs. In addition, the Government has established a national committee on rural development and poverty eradication. The committee's structure entails a network across the country that comprises both the central and local

levels. It has a mandate to promote the implementation of the Government's strategy on rural development and poverty eradication. In that context, a poverty eradication fund has been set up to mobilize additional resources, with a view to addressing inadequate financing.

In carrying out the national poverty eradication strategy, the Government has made a great effort to address the issue of financing. In that regard, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic strongly promotes investment in small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas, in sectors where we have a national comparative advantage, in emerging areas with potential, such as hydropower and ecotourism, and in areas where there is a geographical advantage, such as east-west transit links known as the east-west corridor.

The implementation of the MDGs in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has made relatively steady progress. Since the publication of the first MDG report, in 2004, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been successful in sustaining robust economic growth, with real gross domestic product growth of 8 per cent in 2007. The poverty rate has been reduced from 48 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2007. The percentage of the budget devoted to the education sector has increased from 11 per cent in 2000 to 16 per cent in 2007. The net enrolment rate in primary schools has risen from 58 per cent in 1991 to 84 per cent in 2005. The literacy rate at the primary age level has almost doubled, going from 31 per cent to 58 per cent. As regards child and infant mortality, the mortality rate for children under the age of five declined from 170 per 1,000 to 98 per 1,000 and the infant mortality rate from 104 per 1,000 to 70 per 1,000 between 1995 and 2005. At that rate, the mortality targets set by the MDGs for 2015 seem within reach.

Despite that steady progress, there are still obstacles to overcome in order to meet the targets by 2015. One of the major challenges is to sustain the level of economic growth achieved over the previous decade in the face of high oil and food prices. There is also a need for the Government to address the disparity between people living in urban and rural areas in terms of their ability to improve their livelihoods, including their access to health and education, by reaping the benefits of economic growth.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In that regard, international assistance is needed to help the country address the specific constraints I have outlined, especially in the areas of human and institutional capacity-building and essential infrastructure development, such as transport facilities and telecommunications.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is in the process of acceding to membership of the World Trade Organization. We believe that procedures should be made simpler and more streamlined in order to speed up the process.

In conclusion, it is worth recalling that it is the shared responsibility of developed and developing countries to implement their joint commitments with more resources and more action, so that the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved successfully by 2015.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Relations and International Cooperation of Egypt.

Mr. Ramzy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the decision of the President of the General Assembly to convene this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly at this important juncture of the midway point to the agreed deadline of 2015 to achieve the Goals. This debate provides an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved to date and to harness efforts to face up to the challenges confronting a large number of developing countries that are still a long way off track in their efforts to achieve the Goals, especially in Africa.

I should also like to express my support for the statement delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and for the statement to be delivered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on behalf of the African States.

Eradicating poverty poses the greatest challenge to efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development in developing countries. There is, therefore, a need for a genuine partnership among members of the international community as a whole. In that regard, we welcome the General Assembly's adoption at this session of the resolution proclaiming the Second

United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017).

In recognition of their primary responsibility for their own development and in line with their international commitments, many developing countries have begun to draft and implement pro-poor national policies and strategies aimed at improving the living standards of their citizens. They have also begun to implement many sound macroeconomic policies and to reform their legal, customs and tax systems. However, they still face challenges that constrain their ability to make tangible progress in that regard. One such constraint is the absence of sufficient policy flexibility to allow them to strike a balance between their national policies and their international commitments. That is a crucial issue that affects the freedom of developing countries to put in place strategic public expenditure policies aimed at eradicating poverty.

In the same context, the efforts of developing countries to eradicate poverty require an appropriate international environment that will enable these efforts to go forward at the national level. This calls for an increase in the volume of qualitative official development assistance (ODA) directed to developing countries, together with comprehensive initiatives for external debt relief. It also necessitates reaching an agreement that addresses the imbalance in the international trading system.

In addition, the developing world lacks the sufficient voice and necessary representation to influence the international economic decision-making process. Most international economic decisions that have major impact on the world economy as a whole — and that directly influence the economies of developing countries — are taken in the absence of developing countries, although their share of the international economy has increased.

In that context, we reaffirm the importance of the efforts of the United Nations to eradicate poverty — the core mandate of the Organization's development work — in many developing countries through its operational activities. We look forward to the continuation and strengthening of that role in order to support the efforts made by developing countries at the national level. We would also like to emphasize the role played by various other international and regional organizations — including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — as well as the role of

civil society and the private sector, in support of the efforts of developing countries.

Statistics and numbers confirm the strong organic link that exists between the eradication of poverty and the achievement of MDGs 2 and 3. Today, a few days before the observance of Global Action Week on Education for All, millions of girls are still illiterate and lack educational opportunities at every level. That poses an obstacle to many developing countries' achievement of the MDGs on education by 2015. Nevertheless, developing countries are continuing to make efforts to achieve gender equality at all levels of education, as well as to enhance the quality of education to meet international standards so that young people can enjoy equal and competitive opportunities in employment and in the labour market.

We would like to emphasize the importance of joint international efforts to enhance and raise the national capacities of developing countries to enable them to adopt effective programmes to reduce child mortality and to provide the necessary reproductive health care. It is also important to promote the roles of non-governmental organizations and civil society in those areas.

Egypt attaches great importance to reducing the rate of child mortality. Our efforts have led to a decrease in the under-five mortality rate, which, according to UNICEF statistics, dropped from 91,000 in 1990 to 35,000 in 2006. Egypt is therefore well poised to achieve MDG 4, namely, to reduce child mortality rates by two thirds by 2015.

The Egyptian Government has continued to improve its health insurance system while at the same time encouraging the role of the private sector. We have also expanded the scope of awareness campaigns, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and UNICEF. That has resulted in the reduction of the maternal mortality rate to 84 per 100,000 in 2006, as well as an increase in the life expectancy of women, which is now 107 per cent in comparison to that of men. We have also made efforts to expand the reach of services provided to women in rural areas, with the aim of achieving MDG 5 by reducing maternal mortality rates by 75 per cent.

There is no question that HIV/AIDS is one of the major obstacles to achieving the new MDGs by 2015, in particular Goal 6. Preventing and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis is inextricably

linked to the overall development process. Statistics in the most recent report of the Secretary-General bear out the relationship between malaria and poverty. That is an issue that requires the support of the international community for efforts to develop the infrastructures of economic, educational and health systems. There is also a need to change society's views about dealing with those diseases, to improve our ability to detect them at an early stage and to treat them with the support of all sectors of society. Lastly, there is a need for the transfer of the necessary technology and knowledge in order to support those efforts.

We urge the international community to attach greater importance to the challenges faced by developing countries, in a manner similar to the importance it has recently attached to issues such as climate change. In that regard, I would like to commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to achieve the MDGs, particularly in Africa, and to establish a steering group for that purpose, whose work we hope will contribute to supporting the efforts of African Governments in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

In that context, we also welcome any and all initiatives intended to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs, in particular in Africa. Those include the General Assembly's high-level meeting on Africa's development needs to be held in September, the initiative announced by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to establish a new partnership between the private and public sectors and civil society in order to accelerate the implementation of the MDGs, and the cooperation between the Spanish Government and the United Nations Development Programme to establish a joint fund to support implementation of those goals. We call for coordination and complementarity between those initiatives in order to strengthen the prospects for their success.

We also look forward to the outcomes and recommendations of the various meetings on development to be held this year. We hope they will provide additional momentum to the Review Conference on Financing for Development scheduled to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. The financing for development process is the embodiment of the global partnership for development, with implementation of the MDGs at its core.

The role of the United Nations in following up on the implementation of the outcomes and decisions of United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields is of the utmost importance. Many commitments remain unimplemented, and therefore have a negative impact on the credibility of the United Nations in carrying out its developmental role.

Despite our support for the convening of this thematic debate to address poverty, health and education — as they are of special importance to us — we would have liked the debate to also address MDG 8, on the global partnership for development, for this discussion is taking place in the context of international cooperation, which does not pertain to the commitments of developing countries alone. We also call for the establishment of an intergovernmental mechanism for sustained follow-up to accurately take stock of what has been achieved and to identify the necessary means to get on track towards achieving the Goals. In that connection, we welcome today's call by the President of the General Assembly to continue to hold such annual thematic debates on this subject in order to continue to follow up on the achievement of the MDGs.

I would like to emphasize that the international development agenda is not confined to the MDGs alone, as there exist other internationally agreed development goals reached during various relevant summits and conferences of the United Nations. Together they constitute the international development agenda.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the importance of considering a new international consensus for the post-2015 phase, which should not be considered as the end of the road. That new international consensus should take into account the interests of middle-income countries, which despite progress in certain areas still represent half of the world's poor.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Carolina Rentería, Director-General of the National Planning Department of Colombia.

Mrs. Rentería (Colombia) (spoke in Spanish): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the

Group of 77 and China and with the statement to be delivered by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

Over the past five years, Colombia has experienced high and sustained economic growth, primarily driven by investment. The average growth rate for that period was 5.3 per cent, and 7.5 per cent in 2007. The investment rate went from 15.7 per cent in 2002 to 27.8 per cent in 2007, of which 21 per cent was private investment, and net foreign direct investment added \$8.56 billion. The Government is committed to translating that economic growth into concrete well-being in the country, especially for the most needy.

Colombia has therefore included the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda as an essential element of its social and development policies. In particular, we have aimed at aligning our poverty reduction and equity promotion strategy with the MDGs. Consequently, in March 2005, the Government formalized the country's commitments and strategies for the achievement of the MDGs, which were further incorporated in the national development plan for 2006-2010, entitled "A communitarian State: development for all". In that way, social investment, which constitutes 56 per cent of our investment resources, will be focused on groups and regions that lag furthest behind at the subnational level. The country is consistently making progress towards the fulfilment of the MDGs by 2015, and in some cases even earlier, by 2010.

It is worthwhile to provide some examples of the progress made towards the MDGs in Colombia: extreme poverty, which had had a baseline of 21.6 per cent in 2002, had dropped to 12 per cent by 2006. For the period 2007-2010, more than \$10 billion has been earmarked in order to give priority to reducing the poverty rate to 8 per cent by 2010. That would imply reaching the target for that indicator, which is 8.8 per cent, five years before its 2015 deadline. We underline that that goal is more ambitious than the universal goal established at the Millennium Summit, given the fact that our extreme poverty line is 3.6 times higher than the one defined then.

Gross coverage in basic education, which was at 80 per cent in 1996, went up to 92 per cent in 2006. With investments of more than \$25 billion for the period from 2007 to 2010, Colombia will reach universal coverage in 2010, five years earlier than

expected. Eighty per cent of those resources are managed by decentralized territorial entities, in a country that is extremely decentralized.

Similarly, universal health insurance coverage will be reached by 2009, with a major impact on health indicators. It will eliminate the financial barriers that limit access to services, with guaranteed comprehensive coverage to meet the health needs of the population. In order to achieve that goal, Colombia will have invested resources worth in excess of \$16.5 billion by 2010. Universal insurance coverage will mean better indicators with regard to maternal and child health and the treatment of priority communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, dengue fever and malaria.

Another major challenge for the country will be improving housing and basic sanitation conditions. During the period 2007-2010, the Government expects to fund more than 828,000 social housing solutions, and more than 3.6 million new persons will be provided with piped water, for a total of 43 million Colombians. Four million more will be provided with sewage services, for a total of 41.1 million people.

Overcoming rural poverty is the greatest challenge facing Colombia. We need to provide capacity-building to small farmers so that they will have sufficient and sustainable income. That will depend on access to primary factors of production, financing, technical rural assistance, business support services and training. Improving access to and the quality of education and health, public services and living conditions in the Colombian countryside is a priority of ours.

Colombia is also making progress in ensuring environmental sustainability. For instance, more than 30,000 hectares have been reforested in recent years and more than a million hectares have been incorporated into the national parks system, totalling more than 11 million hectares. By 2006, the country had also succeeded in eliminating 44 per cent of the total amount of ozone-depleting substances that existed in 2003, and we aim at reaching 0 tons by 2010.

As a strategy for making progress in the promotion of the global partnership for development, Colombia works to ensure that resources from participants and the United Nations system are in line with our national development policies, so as to significantly contribute to the fulfilment of the MDGs.

We are concerned to strengthen our national policies for the achievement of the MDGs, taking into account the challenges represented by the regional asymmetries that exist in the country. Colombia therefore requires, through technical and financial cooperation, the constant support and assistance of the international community and of the United Nations system and multilateral financial institutions, in order to reach those Goals in a balanced manner in the various regions of the country. In addition, Colombia believes that it is important and vital that the international community consider the elaboration of more effective criteria to assist middle-income countries, including through the implementation of innovative financial mechanisms.

Given that one of the greatest challenges ahead for the accomplishment of the MDGs consists in making progress in narrowing social, regional and urban-rural gaps, we have improved and strengthened our targeting tools for public spending. Colombia has an instrument for specific targeting that is becoming increasingly strong, reliable and transparent. We are improving the operational processes for subsidies selection and provision, and we are moving towards a policy based on a social-promotion rather than a social-assistance approach, which effectively ensures the rights of the people, the exercise of citizenship, the inclusion of the poor and excluded and social cohesion.

We are proud of the fact that Colombia is the first middle-income country of Latin America to design and carry out a comprehensive strategy for poverty and inequality reduction, the implementation of which is going forward. That strategy aims at, among other things, coordinating the provision of social services by the State in order to overcome, from a structural perspective, families' extreme poverty conditions. We are carrying out an unprecedented effort to effect managerial and institutional transformation through the Juntos Network, a fundamental pillar of the social promotion system.

Families in extreme poverty in the Juntos Network — more than 1.5 million families, including 440,000 families affected by forced displacement — must attain, with the support and follow-up of the system's institutions, 46 basic goals that contribute to overcoming extreme poverty. Those goals cover nine areas: identification; income and employment, including training for employment, access to assets and productive projects; preschool and primary, secondary

and post-secondary education; health, namely access to the health insurance system; nutrition; habitability, that is, basic living conditions and sanitation; family dynamics; banking and savings, including access to banking services and micro-insurance; and access to legal support services. Personalized assistance to the families in their homes and communities is provided through social workers; this will enable them to overcome the situation within a framework of shared responsibility. In this way, the families become agents and promoters of their own development.

The development, coordination and consolidation of the social protection system constitute a great challenge. The system is universal in nature. It is financed by State subsidies focused on poor and vulnerable families and by contributions with those with the ability to pay. It coordinates strategies and mechanisms for protection, social development, human resources development and access to funding in order to prevent risks and mitigate and overcome impact on families and populations.

Colombia has also made significant progress in the promotion of gender equality. Thanks to equality in basic education coverage, with even better educational achievement attained by women, we have focused on gender equality in the labour market and on the reduction of domestic violence, in particular that directed against women partners. To this end, we have implemented measures such as the inclusion of a gender-based approach in plans, programmes and public policies and follow-up and evaluation through a labour market observatory which examines labour statistics disaggregated by gender. We have also implemented intersector strategies to prevent and address domestic violence.

In addition, Colombia has made progress in involving civil society and the private sector in follow-up and assessment of the MDGs. Jointly with the United Nations system, we published and distributed our MDG report, which is entitled "Towards a more inclusive and equitable Colombia". The document was introduced at a nationally broadcast Saturday-long Government town hall meeting, at which each of the relevant national-level entities reported on its achievements and on the challenges ahead. A second follow-up report, developed and disseminated in the same manner, will be issued this year.

We are aware of our particular challenges and internal difficulties, and Colombia, its Government and its citizens are committed to achieve and sometimes to exceed the planned goals, honouring the commitments undertaken at the Millennium Summit. Colombia has a dream, a vision of a country built on trust, which is based on three fundamental premises: security based on democracy; socially responsible investment, developed through a transparent relationship between investors and the State, through committed solidarity with communities, especially in the environmental field, and through fraternal labour relations in which hate among social classes is not encouraged; and, social cohesion based on freedom.

My country's challenge is not solely to meet the national targets we have set with regard to the MDGs, but rather, fundamentally, to attain them as part of a strategy for accelerated social development that is internationally competitive, regionally balanced, inclusive and peaceful.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Gareth Thomas, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Thomas (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom supports the statement made by my Slovenian colleague this morning on behalf of the European Union (EU).

In 2000, the international community declared that we would spare no effort to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Huge progress has been made. But halfway to 2015, our pace is too slow. The United Kingdom Government is deeply committed to delivering the Millennium Development Goals and has focused on a handful of themes which we consider critical to their achievement.

When almost one billion people are living below the poverty line, it is clearly essential to increase levels of economic growth and the volume of trade between countries. When 72 million children were still out of primary school, as recently as 2005, helping countries to build more schools and hire more teachers is also clearly essential. Nor can we ignore the importance of child mortality, when more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday. In short, we need to reignite international attention, enthusiasm and action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We will achieve the progress we all want only if we can increase aid. Our aid volumes in the United Kingdom are on track to reach 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2013, well ahead of schedule. However, we agree with the European Union and with the President of the General Assembly that a concerted effort from across the international community is now needed to meet the pledges we all made back in 2005.

Yesterday we heard the President of the General Assembly, Srgjan Kerim, say that 2008 was a window of opportunity to accelerate progress on the MDGs. The Secretary-General himself echoed those sentiments when he said that 2008 should mark a turning point in progress towards the MDGs.

In January, the Secretary-General and my Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, were joined by representatives from Governments, from the private sector and from civil society in launching a year of action on the MDGs. At every possible opportunity this year, we need to work together to promote further action. Any action we take, of course, must address implementation gaps and must scale up the successes that there have been.

As part of the United Kingdom's contribution to this effort, we will co-host a meeting of chief executive officers of major companies with the United Nations Development Programme, in London on 6 May. That meeting will showcase how the private sector can use core business expertise to support growth and reduce poverty in developing countries.

Between now and September there are a number of international forums where accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals can and must be discussed. In particular, of course, there is the Economic and Social Council. I am delighted that I will be there to deliver our presentation and to set out the United Kingdom's progress towards reaching our commitments under the Millennium Development Goals, and, of course, towards helping others to reach theirs.

Most important, the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly will co-host a high-level meeting on the MDGs in New York on 25 September. That meeting will bring together world leaders, civil society and the private sector. Much has been said during today's meeting about the need for actions, not just words. We hope countries will use the 25 September meeting as an opportunity to set out

specific commitments and practical action plans on the MDGs that they will take forward.

Just last week our Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced a partnership to help get 16 million children into school by 2010. In September last year, Gordon Brown, together with ministers from developing and donor nations, launched the International Health Partnership to improve donor, country and agency work on the way that aid money is spent in the area of health.

I encourage all nations to attend the meeting in September and, in line with the examples I have just mentioned, consider how they can contribute to accelerate action to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Today we have the knowledge, we have the technology and we have the wealth to make a difference for millions of people on our planet, helping to lift them out of the grinding poverty that still faces too many of them, and giving them the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to be healthy and the opportunity to make enough to support their families.

As the President of the General Assembly said yesterday, we must now demonstrate the collective political will to turn our promises into action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Mario Pivaral, Vice-Minister of Planning and Programming of Guatemala.

Mr. Pivaral (Guatemala) (spoke in Spanish): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the invitation to participate in this important debate, a debate which will enable us to understand various positions on this subject and to have an exchange of experiences, which is always beneficial to expanding our vision.

At the outset, I would like to associate my delegation with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the statement to be made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

In the year 2000, the heads of State of the States Members of the United Nations made a commitment in the Millennium Declaration to achieving eight objectives now known as the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). Those objectives are fully compatible with the firm and lasting peace accords signed by the State of Guatemala in 1996. They also constitute a commitment between developed and developing countries to progress sustainably towards achieving the Goals by 2015.

The report of progress achieved towards the Millennium Development Goals in Guatemala, prepared by the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency, concludes that our country can achieve most of the MDGs by 2015 if we are able to meet three basic and fundamental conditions. We must first accelerate the pace of inclusive economic growth — in other words, economic growth in sectors in which most of our population works in conditions of poverty, such as agriculture — and sustain it until 2015. Secondly, we must adopt complementary policies of income redistribution, and thirdly, we must invest in a series of highly coordinated social policies of proven effectiveness.

Poverty and inequality must not be approached in an isolated way by each actor or sector; rather, it is only through the coordinated execution of economic growth policies that generate employment in the poorest regions, and through highly effective and focused social policies for the most needy, that we will find a sustainable way out of the social, economic and political exclusion in which more than half of the Guatemalan population finds itself.

Our report is innovative because it takes into account the role that cultural diversity and gender differences play in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, evidencing the close relationship between reaching those Goals and overcoming cultural, ethnic and gender discrimination.

We have made important strides in education, health and the construction of institutions on which development depends. In education, we have achieved significant increases in the net rate of enrolment, while still facing the challenge of increasing scholarly achievement for children — in other words, ensuring that every child who starts elementary school finishes it successfully. In 2008, we have assigned 8 per cent more of the budget for investment in educational resources than we did in 2007. With respect to health goals, one of our biggest achievements is the reduction of infant mortality by 50 per cent.

However, 10 years after signing the peace accords, we still face serious challenges in consolidating the rule of law and deepening democracy, which is why we must now transform those indicators of health, education and mortality into processes of net poverty reduction, the biggest challenge faced by our country with respect to the MDGs. In 2008, we have an 18.7 per cent rate of extreme poverty, compared to 21.5 per cent in 2004.

Finally, the report confirms that the relevance of increased democratization at the international level — especially in the areas of access to decision-making in the many forums of international governance; effective access to free trade, especially in the area of agriculture; access to better public and external private financing; and access to new technologies — will facilitate the conjugation of countries' internal efforts with a genuine partnership with the principal developed economies.

In closing, I wish to share some of the political guidelines adopted by our Government within the framework of the peace accords of December 1996, some 80 days after it came to power, which will contribute comprehensively to the achievement of the MDGs. They include our Government plan for 2008-2012 and a longer-term development vision in our "Plan of Hope 2008-2032", which is a project for social and economic development that prioritizes social cohesion whereby productivity, solidarity, competitiveness and regionalization will be the pillars of the development implemented in 2008-2012.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Amina Ibrahim, Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria.

Mrs. Ibrahim (Nigeria): My delegation commends your firm commitment, Sir, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as exemplified by the laudable and timely initiative of convening this thematic debate as we approach the half-way milestone to the target date of 2015, and more especially against the backdrop of widespread concern that sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to achieve the MDGs on schedule.

We concur with the statements made by Ms. Joanne Massiah, Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Marine Resources and Agro Industry of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of Africa and the Group of 77 and China, and the statement to be

read out by the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of Africa. We also wish to reflect further on the issue.

Nigeria remains firmly committed to the achievement of the MDGs and has effectively aligned them with its national economic empowerment development strategy of 2004. That policy framework encompasses macroeconomic policies and interventions that are directed at poverty reduction to benefit all segments of Nigerian society and to induce economic growth that invests in its people. The current Government of our President, Mr. Umaru Yar'Adua, has reinforced his commitment in our seven-point agenda for development that guides the next phase of our reform and the vision of Nigeria becoming one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020.

As Nigeria strives to deliver on the MDGs, it is clear to us all that the eight Goals must be seen as interdependent and, as such, need to be implemented in a manner that mutually reinforces the whole development agenda.

Nigeria has recorded successes over the past seven years in growth rates of 6 per cent and the reduction of its overall poverty levels to 54.4 per cent, while seeing its enrolment rates in primary school soar to 84 per cent. The ratio of girls to boys in our basic education system has improved, and we have seen our women placed in key decision-making roles at the highest levels of our Government. Renewed efforts with our immunization programme have also seen decreases in our child mortality, and we have stopped and reversed the national trend of HIV/AIDS.

Nigeria, in 2005, took the bold step of utilizing the savings of \$1 billion annually, made from the landmark Paris Club debt deal, and set that amount aside in a virtual poverty fund, which is dedicated to the sole expenditure of MDG projects and programmes that scale up investments in key related sectors. This has resulted in the employment of an additional 40,000 teachers for basic education and in the delivery of in-service training to 145,000 primary school teachers annually. This spending has also funded the gap for the eradication of the wild polio virus by the end of 2009. It has provided emergency obstetric care in 18 tertiary hospitals in our country and has increased the number of primary health-care centres. We have also invested in scaling up the provision of bednets, providing over half a million bednets last year and the year before, and

of artemisinin-based combination therapies. It has also provided for antiretroviral therapies and the treatment of an additional 75,000 Nigerians.

We have also provided innovative means of access to microcredit for women and designed new programmes of conditional grants to our states that not only address the MDGs but encourage governance and accountability.

A social safety net initiative has also been launched, through a conditional cash transfer scheme. It targets the poorest of our marginalized groups: our widows, those with special needs, women with vesico-vaginal fistula and those living, and caring for others, with HIV/AIDS. That is just a snapshot of some of Nigeria's successes, which give us hope that we can get back on track and deliver the MDGs by 2015.

However, we are facing daunting challenges in achieving the Goals, especially those that address maternal health. Other challenges that are impeding our getting back on track include the need for effective intergovernmental collaboration among our three tiers of government, the availability of reliable data and statistics, institutional and human resource capacity, democracy and the rule of law, genuine partnership for development and ensuring that the gains of our macroeconomic growth actually have a real impact on the lives of our poor.

My delegation strongly feels that developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, would be in a better position to achieve all the MDGs if our development partners could fast-track implementing their part of the commitments made with respect to Goal 8. We therefore reiterate our earlier call for the international community to take concerted and time-bound action to ensure that all the commitments made by developed countries, addressing, in particular, trade, debt and aid effectiveness, are adhered to.

In this respect, we believe that there is a unique opportunity for the MDG Africa Steering Group, chaired by the Secretary-General, to give to the September high-level meeting a concrete timetable for meeting the commitments of the Group of Eight and others by 2010. That would go a long way to demonstrating the credibility of that important initiative by the Secretary-General. Africa and Nigeria, for their part, have already demonstrated their commitment by the current efforts that have been taken

and by those that are being proposed for between now and 2015.

Finally, let us talk less about the global compact and act to deliver concrete results that our poorest can touch and feel, so that the MDGs become a reality and not another broken promise.

The Acting President: As members are aware, there are still some 100 speakers inscribed on the list for this thematic debate. In this connection, it will be necessary to hold an additional plenary meeting this evening, from 6 to 9 p.m. I would like once again to appeal to speakers to limit their statements to five minutes so that we can exhaust the list of speakers at a reasonable hour tomorrow. I hope that I can count on the cooperation of representatives to keep to this time limit.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alexis Bizimungu, Chef de Cabinet of the Vice-Ministry of Planning of Burundi.

Mr. Bizimungu (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the delegation of Burundi to share the efforts made by the Government of my country towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. I would like at the outset to stress that Burundi aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We support the recommendations contained in that statement. My delegation also aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries and the statement to be made by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of African States.

Burundi is recovering from a long socio-economic crisis that has lasted for more than a decade and has caused serious harm in the social, economic and security spheres. Despite the numerous obstacles, the Burundi authorities have, since September 2002, truly committed themselves to achieving reforms and measures aimed at achieving the MDGs. In order to meet our commitments, we have sought to integrate MDG commitments into our economic planning cycle. Hence, the Government's five-year programme for 2005-2010, the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding and the Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper and the Priority Action Programme are pillars for achieving the MDGs.

As in most sub-Saharan developing countries, progress towards achieving the MDG targets has been rather slow and modest in Burundi. I would like to describe some of the efforts made by the Government of Burundi towards achieving each of the eight Goals as well as the measures that have been taken to achieve them.

With regard to Goal 1, the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger, Burundi will register a delay in its accomplishment. In fact, the poverty index, which was 34.8 per cent in 1990, is now estimated at 68 per cent. The rate of investment went from 16.6 per cent of gross domestic product in 1993 to less than 8 per cent in 2002. In 2006, this rate increased slightly, reaching 11.6 per cent of gross domestic product. However, it continues to be very low compared with the high rate that is required.

With regard to promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, Burundi, although far from reaching parity, can be proud of considerable improvement. Indeed, our constitution sets a quota of 30 per cent for women in our institutions, and this has been respected in the allocation of parliamentary seats and Government posts. Similarly, the number of women occupying high civil service posts has increased in a positive manner. Further, to facilitate access to credit by women, who represent a major part of the disadvantaged population, and to improve their conditions of life, the Government has established a fund for promoting microprojects, particularly those initiated by women.

In terms of education, the net rate of school enrolment, which was 42 per cent in 1996, has increased considerably: it improved by around 81 per cent in 2006 and by about 101 per cent in 2007, thanks to the normalization of the security situation in much of the national territory, and particularly thanks to the presidential measure to ensure free primary education. However, in order to achieve the objective of universal schooling, we must continue to increase the rate of access, improve the rate of student retention and promote awareness among parents. Indeed, only 37 per cent of children who go to school finish primary schooling. Despite the absence of any discrimination, girls continue to be left behind. That is mainly due to parents who are not fully aware of the benefits of education. We also see too many students repeating the school year and high drop-out rates.

In terms of health, the situation of children under five years of age is of great concern. Indeed, because of deteriorating sanitation infrastructure, the lack of medical staff and the remoteness of certain areas of the country, the chances for the success of and follow-up to national immunization campaigns are largely compromised. Despite the efforts of the Government, such as the provision of free health care for children under five years old, the country is unlikely to meet its immunization goals unless it obtains significant support from its development partners.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, the pandemic continues to be an obstacle to the development efforts made by the Government of Burundi. On the basis of the trends thus far, we can predict a national HIV/AIDS rate of 10 to 11 per cent. In order to manage the HIV/AIDS problem at the institutional level, a department has been set up to deal with this issue. At the operational level, the various care programmes and national awareness policies do not yet ensure full access for people who are affected, despite the efforts that have been made both nationally and internationally.

With regard to clean drinking water, various public investment programmes have had to slow down because of the crisis, whereas before 1993 the proportion of the population with access to clean drinking water on a sustainable basis had increased considerably. It is therefore unlikely that this particular objective will be achieved by 2015.

In the area of the environment, the degradation of our natural ecosystems has revealed itself in the lack of protection for biodiversity and the progressive loss of forest cover. The Government is undertaking efforts to plant as many trees as possible in order to create better environmental conditions.

In terms of commerce and foreign trade, Burundi continues to suffer from deteriorating terms of trade. The resources generated by transactions with the rest of the world are still inadequate for us to meet the priority needs of the population as a whole and, in particular, those who are affected by the crisis.

In terms of the global partnership for development, the success at the Paris Club in March 2004 gave a new lease on life to Burundi's economy. Burundi welcomed the announcements made at the round table by partners in May 2007, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners, in

particular those partners who have already disbursed the funds promised at that round table. We also take this opportunity to make an appeal to those who have not yet done so to meet their commitments.

Given the current situation and if today's trends persist, unless the international community continues to provide financial support to Burundi, including the forgiveness of all its debt, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be achieved by 2015 and could even be undermined.

Before closing, given the poor performance achieved by a number of countries in regard to the MDGs, the delegation of Burundi would like to submit to the international community the following recommendations.

First, world leaders should reaffirm their commitment to do everything possible to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Secondly, it is important to go beyond mere statements of intention and to make determined and rigorous efforts to reverse current trends. Thus, an appropriate solution should be found for the basic problem of financing for development, including by respecting commitments that were made at international conferences, in particular the Monterrey Consensus. Thirdly, it is important to support developing countries in their efforts aimed at developing the agricultural sector and promoting a reduction in poverty. Fourthly, it is important to mobilize the necessary resources to finance capacity-building in developing countries in priority sectors while respecting the principle of national ownership. Fifthly and finally, the international financial institutions must step up their efforts to establish an integrated strategy for financing for development for countries in special circumstances, such as the least developed countries and countries in post-conflict situations.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the member States of the Rio Group.

The member States of the Rio Group have made considerable efforts in recent years to promote the economic growth of their societies and achieve a favourable environment for development. Such efforts have brought about important results in the area of poverty reduction and the improvement of important indicators, such as the human development index.

On this occasion, we reiterate our determination and commitment to fight urgently against the severe problems of poverty, social exclusion and inequality, which affect, in varying measure, the nations of the hemisphere, to confront their root causes and their consequences and to create favourable conditions for equitable socio-economic development in order to promote fairer societies. In that regard, the countries of the region have been working on the establishment of joint mechanisms for the firm and consistent implementation of measures to decrease levels of poverty and increase access, by the entirety of our societies to essential public services, such as education and health, so as to guarantee that every individual is capable of reaching his or her full potential, regardless of social origin. In addition, it is important to make progress on gender equity, bearing in mind the multiplier effect of policies that favour the advancement of women.

The Millennium Development Goals provide us with useful guidelines for establishing the minimum standards that our societies must meet. The year 2015 is our deadline. Without hesitation, we, the member countries of the Rio Group, reaffirm our commitment to those Goals. We also encourage all other members of the international community to do the same.

The countries of the Rio Group recognize that reaching the Millennium Development Goals, and in general achieving the sustainable development of our societies, is a complex process involving national and international elements. That process is supported by a broad and genuine commitment to solidarity by the Governments of the world, which of necessity entails effective and efficient international cooperation to finance the achievement of those Goals.

In that regard, we recall that the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, because of its holistic approach and the call for consistency between all public policies and private sector efforts that have an impact on development, constitutes an important contribution to understanding and collective advancement towards fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. We consider that both this thematic debate and the Doha Conference constitute privileged moments for the international community to review what has been achieved; to recognize the long path remaining to be travelled; and, above all, to

commit decisively to undertaking the necessary actions to meet those Goals.

It is clear and alarming that, at the current rate of progress, many countries will not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. There is no doubt about this, and, moreover, it has been demonstrated irrefutably in the most recent reports and surveys on the matter.

In this context, the countries of the Rio Group reaffirm that development constitutes a shared responsibility, and that it is indispensable for all countries to fulfil their commitments in the area of international cooperation. It is particularly necessary that all developed countries reach the goal of setting aside 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance.

Likewise, we must ensure that development efforts are coordinated and as effective as possible. Accordingly, the countries of the Rio Group believe in the usefulness of the principles contained in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the importance of promoting them.

In addition, we must bear in mind the diverse situations faced by the countries of the so-called South and keep a balanced perspective that guarantees that all those that need it can count on the multilateral and bilateral support of the international community to achieve their development goals.

We wish in particular to call for continued support and adequate attention to middle-income countries and their specific needs, keeping in mind that, according to the estimates of this Organization itself, more than 40 per cent of the people subsisting on less than two dollars per day reside in those countries.

Similarly, the Rio Group reaffirms the usefulness of continuing the search for innovative financing mechanisms as an effective tool for reaching the Millennium Development Goals and for joining efforts between countries at different stages of development in the fight against hunger and poverty, without prejudice to the traditional mechanisms and commitments relevant to that fight.

On behalf of the Rio Group, I wish to state that the United Nations, as the multilateral forum par excellence, and because of its decades of experience of fostering and supporting development, is in a strategic position to undertake this reflection and become a

guarantor for the fulfilment of our commitments. May it rest assured of our wholehearted support to progress in that direction.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): Allow me to say first that I associate myself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. On this occasion, I am honoured to speak on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The five Nordic countries join their voices in this statement to stress a key message: the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), cannot be achieved without a broader enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We are convinced that healthy women with the freedom to participate fully in society are a prerequisite for any country to achieve its full potential for sustainable economic and social development; that the ability of women to control their own fertility and their access to reproductive health services is necessary to significantly reduce maternal and child mortality rates; that access for young men and women to contraceptives, comprehensive sex education and confidential reproductive health services is crucial in reducing adolescent birth rates; that sexual and reproductive health education and access to reproductive health services are the best guarantees for the prevention of HIV/AIDS; and that every person's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental for achieving gender equality.

We have a long way to go, however. It is estimated that 70 per cent of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty are women and girls; that two thirds of the world's work is carried out by women and girls for less than 5 per cent of the total income; that each year there are over 500,000 maternal deaths — one woman dying every minute from complications during pregnancy or childbirth — and more than 90 per cent of those deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; that one quarter to one half of girls in developing countries become mothers before age 18; and that 60 per cent of HIV-positive adults in sub-Saharan Africa are women, and 75 per cent of newly infected youth are girls and young women aged 15 to 24.

Therefore, the Nordic countries have put sexual and reproductive health and rights at the centre of our

international development cooperation. We encourage all partners to do the same, and we expect the United Nations to be a leader in these efforts.

We welcome the fact that the General Assembly has included universal access to reproductive health by 2015 as a target in the MDGs. That target is a clear signal to all of us to step up our support to programmes promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): Austria is very grateful to the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As we have seen in the statements made thus far, we all agree that some progress has been made since 2000. But we also agree that a lot remains to be done.

The question is therefore: how will we reach the MDGs by 2015? Austria, for its part, is strongly committed to the official development assistance targets and to the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. We will spare no efforts over the coming years to fully live up to those commitments by raising the quantity as well as the quality of aid. We are especially committed to helping those that need it most: the least developed countries and Africa.

The eradication of poverty is the key target of the MDGs and has always been the most important issue of international development cooperation. Poverty is not just a question of income. It is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions, comprising, inter alia, exclusion from the elementary human rights to food, education and health. Poverty often means living without security, being exposed to diseases, natural disasters and violence. Poor people find themselves at the margins of society, frequently deprived of their independence and their right to self-determination.

Determined pro-poor policies, national strategies for poverty reduction and political participation are important elements for reducing poverty. It is imperative that women fully participate in the political and economic decision-making process. When people have hope and a perspective of meaningful participation in political life, when they do not feel discriminated against or excluded from education and job markets, they will not take up arms. The combination of poverty and violence represents a formidable obstacle for achieving poverty alleviation and the MDGs in general.

Unfortunately, the very substantial challenge of the eradication of poverty is exacerbated by the all-pervasive phenomenon of climate change. Many of the root causes of poverty are closely linked to environmental phenomena. Our efforts to fight climate change are therefore central to the fight against poverty and the attainment of sustainable development.

Even though the negative effects of climate change are a growing concern for all of us, some countries are particularly affected. While Austrian glaciers are melting, small islands are confronted with rising sea levels, floods, hurricanes and other weather phenomena. Other regions are facing drought, land degradation and desertification. It is imperative that we help those countries most affected by climate change to adapt to its effects. If we do not, the attainment of the MDGs will remain no more than a dream. We also need to intensify international cooperation on energy issues. Sustainable energy systems are a prerequisite for the attainment of the MDGs and for stabilizing the global climate.

Only those who help quickly help effectively. We must support those most vulnerable — such as small island States — to adapt to climate change, while at the same time stepping up our efforts to mitigate the causes of climate change. It is my firm conviction that a successful implementation of the MDGs is not possible without progress in that field.

Finally, our eighth Millennium pledge was that we would develop a global partnership for development. We have come some way towards realizing that Goal. But the test of our claim will be progress in the effective implementation of the remaining seven MDGs.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the thematic debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.25 p.m.



General Assembly

Sixty-second session

89th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 2 April 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Kerim (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (continued)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mrs. Diallo (Mali) (*spoke in French*): First of all, it is my pleasant duty to thank the President, on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, for organizing this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I also wish to express our thanks for the quality and relevance of the documents made available to us. Finally, I would like to thank the panellists for clarifications that they gave us yesterday morning on the status of the MDGs. I am thinking in particular of Mr. Paul Collier, whose work on landlocked developing countries held our attention completely.

Our Group fully subscribes to the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. However, I would like to elaborate on some aspects that are of particular relevance to the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, unwilling to accept the extreme poverty in which millions of

human beings live in a world of such tremendous potential, we have made a statement in which we have, *inter alia*, expressed our firm will to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in the number of those living in extreme poverty by the year 2015. That is with a view to making our world more worthy of its people by giving each inhabitant of the planet a better quality of life.

To achieve that goal, we have, during international meetings that followed, undertaken a number of important commitments. They include establishing a system of good governance, developing and implementing appropriate strategies for poverty reduction, granting to the poorest countries substantial assistance of up to 0.7 per cent of gross national product of developed countries, and technology transfer and infrastructure development for countries of the South.

So where do we stand, seven years after that declaration? Encouraging results have, of course, been achieved on a global scale in all areas, but unfortunately their extent varies according to the objectives, the regions and sometimes even within States.

For our Group, the Landlocked Developing Countries, the figures speak for themselves. With 12.5 per cent of the surface area of continents and 4 per cent of global population, we receive only 0.3 per cent of worldwide gross national product.

The average wealth accumulation per capita is clearly below that of other developing countries. For example, from 2003 to 2004, at the same time that per

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capita income grew by an average of almost 5 per cent in countries of the South, landlocked developing countries, given the cost of their isolation, registered only 3.7 per cent.

The toll exacted by our enclave status weighs heavily on our ability to achieve the MDGs in the States members of our Group.

With very low incomes, due to the fact that we derive almost no benefit from the advantages of globalization, we encounter tremendous difficulties in financing our development in general and programmes to achieve the MDGs in particular, specifically in health, education, fighting malnutrition, and fighting HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

While the objectives in those areas are almost achieved in the countries of the North, in 2006, in the majority of landlocked developing countries, about half of school-age children did not attend school. It is the same with regard to malnutrition. And to that we should add that more than two thirds of the population live on less than two dollars a day and that life expectancy barely exceeds 40 years.

All of this is to say that our Group deserves special attention from the international community, which should focus more on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, which aims at reducing the deleterious consequences of our enclave status. The midterm review of the Programme will take place on 2 and 3 October 2008. The review will be preceded by a preparatory phase that has already begun with two ministerial meetings, one on infrastructure and the other on commerce and the facilitation of trade, held in Ouagadougou and Ulan Bator, respectively. They pointed to mixed results in infrastructure and in the participation of landlocked developing countries in world trade. Those States are becoming more vulnerable due to the disturbing increase in oil prices, which because of the concomitant rise in transport costs is a heavy burden on their competitiveness. And to that we add the harmful effects of climate change, which increase the effects of isolation on the landlocked developing countries.

So I call for full and diligent implementation of the Almaty Programme, which will undoubtedly help speed up the achievement of the MDGs in our member States. I should like here to encourage the international community, in particular our development partners and

our neighbours of transit, to support the programme review process.

I also launch an earnest appeal for strengthening the capacities of United Nations agencies and institutions involved in organizing the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action, especially the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States, which coordinates the organization of that review.

I cannot end, without thanking the President for his personal commitment to our Group, which we have seen, *inter alia*, in the appointment of a facilitator, namely, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Japan, whom I deeply thank here today on behalf of our Group.

Mrs. 'Utoikamanu (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (Pacific SIDS) namely Fiji, Nauru, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

At the outset, we wish to thank the President for convening this thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015". We fully support his call for urgent action, as well as the emphasis provided by this debate, which offers a window of opportunity for the international community to redouble its efforts to achieve the Goals.

At midpoint between the historic Millennium Summit of 2000 where our world leaders endorsed the road map for a better world, to be gauged by the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the Pacific SIDS have made some notable progress in specific areas towards achieving the MDGs. However, at current trends, most of the Pacific SIDS face challenges to achieving all of the MDGs by 2015. While we embrace primary responsibility for our development, it is also recognized that the Pacific SIDS face common constraints that make their economies more vulnerable, due to the very nature of their size, remoteness from markets, limited human resource capacity and vulnerability to natural catastrophes and the impact of climate change.

Those challenges are exacerbated where there is conflict and civil-political instability. Governance challenges, the impact of global externalities such as rising oil and food prices, domestic rural-urban migration and labour mobility have also limited the ability of the Pacific Governments to implement the necessary policy initiatives to realize significant MDG gains.

Our leaders recognized that these serious challenges require the pooling of scarce regional governance resources and the alignment of policies to strengthen national capacities. Regional integration and cooperation therefore play a vital role in supporting the Pacific SIDS. In 2005, our leaders endorsed the Pacific Plan, which reflects the region's priorities and which was subsequently reaffirmed in 2007 to be in line with and to support the implementation of international frameworks such as the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation.

The Pacific Plan focuses on four overlapping pillars, including economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security, with strategic frameworks that include increasing the levels of sustainable returns to the Pacific, ensuring the successful implementation of regional cooperation at the national level, meeting common responsibilities and providing services in a cost-effective manner, and developing partnerships with neighbours and beyond.

While globally the Asia-Pacific region leads the way on poverty reduction, with very high economic growth rates in some countries, the Pacific SIDS have not been as successful, with lower rates of economic growth and an indication of greater poverty. The Pacific SIDS are growing on average at about 3 per cent annually. Individual country performance, however, tends to be diverse and uneven. The average growth rate is insufficient to meet the requirements needed to balance competing national priorities with resource constraints and to enhance the effectiveness of often diminishing aid to produce better development outcomes.

Energy is a key driver of economic growth in the Pacific SIDS and the rising price of oil hampers the capital accumulation necessary to sustain the development process. It is therefore essential that affordable, clean and efficient energy is available to all through reliable, affordable energy services.

Available data suggest that, on average, one in four households in the Pacific experiences poverty and hardship, as measured by the national basic-needs poverty line. However, hunger is not a significant issue for many countries in the Pacific. Although malnutrition does exist, obesity and its consequent non-communicable diseases have become a growing challenge in most Pacific island countries.

There has been significant progress in access to educational opportunities for boys and girls and in gender parity in education, with relatively high primary school enrolment rates in all the countries in our Group, ranging from 100 per cent to 60.3 per cent. Those figures highlight that education is both recognized as a basic human right and seen as essential to underpin the future prosperity of the Pacific countries. At the same time, while enrolment rates may be high, there is a need to look at completion rates to ensure that the number of children out of school is reduced. There is a particular need in some Pacific countries to give more attention to ensuring that females are able to attend and complete their schooling.

There are more women present in the labour force than ever recorded previously. However, the share of women in the non-agricultural sectors is much less than that of men, and many women are likely to work in agriculture and often as unpaid family workers. Our leaders in 2007 endorsed the concept that work be undertaken to explore ways to enhance the participation particularly of women in decision-making processes and institutions, in particular the parliamentary process. The gender dimension, however, should also be addressed throughout all interventions, and not just on MDG 3, in order to improve gender equality, empower women and make resources available for appropriate interventions.

The rates of child and infant mortality, which are amongst the most important indicators of social development, are generally improving in Pacific small island developing States, although regional and subregional variations can be noted, requiring additional efforts and attention at the subnational level in those countries. Substantial progress has also been made in some countries on the immunization of 1-year olds against measles. Improvement is needed to extend coverage to all children in most countries.

The number of cases of tuberculosis is estimated to have increased since 1990. The reported HIV infection rate remains low for most Pacific small island developing States. Pacific Governments have, however, recognized the need to respond to that challenge head on, and consequently most Pacific small island developing States have a national multisectoral HIV/AIDS strategic plan in place. That is complemented by the regional HIV/AIDS strategy, which contributes to coordinated responses. Countries are addressing the need to undertake legislative reform and to put in place the appropriate legal framework to ensure that the rights of people living with HIV are respected. The challenge for Pacific small island developing States is to turn the policy and legal frameworks into reality through appropriate planning, costing and budgetary allocations.

The importance of environmental sustainability is recognized in all Pacific island countries through the integration of sustainable development into country policies and programmes. However, while it is accepted that managing the environment contributes to the achievement of other MDGs and is crucial for future generations, the translation of policies into action on the ground has been challenging for most Pacific island countries.

On reversing the loss of environmental resources, the Pacific presents a mixed picture, with rapid rates of deforestation occurring in some countries. Access to safe water, which is critical to reducing child mortality and to contributing to the achievement of other Goals, is relatively high in most Pacific island countries. However, sustainable access to improved water sources and sanitation needs improvement in rural and remote areas.

Advocating and supporting both policy and behavioural change in the areas of natural resource and environmental management, including mitigation and adaptation to climate change, has been identified by regional frameworks as key to reducing that long-term vulnerability and building more resilient Pacific small island developing States and communities. There is growing evidence that climate change is one of the most important threats to the social, economic and environmental development of Pacific island countries. That has the potential to have serious adverse consequences for socio-economic development, even to the extent of threatening the very existence of some

States, particularly those that are predominantly atolls. That has serious implications for MDG achievement.

Increasing populations, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, dependence on such climate-sensitive industries as tourism, fisheries and agriculture, and the location of major infrastructure in coastal areas make Pacific island countries particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. Support needs to be provided to the Pacific island countries to assess climate change risks and to develop and adopt strategies that contribute to sustainable development, sound environmental management and judicious resource use.

The challenges for the Pacific small island developing States to get back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015 are daunting, but not impossible with an increased level of the support of the international community to address the plethora of issues, including the need to accelerate economic growth rates to more sustainable levels, strengthening governance systems, addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic more effectively, addressing education and health challenges and addressing vulnerabilities related to climate change and natural disasters, while also addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and the empowerment of women. Addressing the special needs of small island developing States, including access to technology, affordable and available medicines, and jobs for their growing populations, particularly for young people, are important steps to reach the MDGs in the Pacific.

The Pacific small island developing States are of the view that serious consideration of the MDGs cannot be made without reference to financing for development, which includes the scaling up of the quality and quantity of official development assistance. It is also fully recognized that even when there is an increase in official development assistance, it has to be complemented by functional systems, institutions and processes so that improved aid effectiveness produces better and relevant development outcomes.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group. Our Group would like to associate itself with the statement made this morning by Ms. Joanne Massiah, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Marine Resources and Agro Industry of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The African Group wishes to express its appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate and for the provision of the thematic background papers. African countries welcome the decision of the General Assembly to convene the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs on 22 September 2008.

We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for establishing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Africa Steering Group charged with the responsibility of ensuring that Africa meets the targets of the MDGs. Africa is looking forward to the high-level meeting on the MDGs that will take place on 25 September 2008.

In recalling the Millennium Declaration, we attach great importance to the intentions with regard to development, which state that

"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want." (*resolution 55/2, para. 11*)

However, It is disappointing to all of us that, midway between their adoption in 2000 and the target date of 2015 for achieving the MDGs, African countries — in particular in sub-Saharan Africa — are not on track to achieve any of the goals. Even the best governed countries on the continent have not been able to make sufficient progress in reducing extreme poverty in its many forms. Reaching the MDG target of halving the extent of extreme poverty by 2015 requires that the current pace be nearly doubled.

Yet time is running out for making the needed practical investments. Existing commitments made and reaffirmed by world leaders at the G8 summit at Gleneagles and the 2005 World Summit could be sufficient to meet the Goals, in particular when the efforts of the African countries at development are combined with adequate financial and technical support from the international community. At the midway point of 2008, those commitments must be urgently translated into practical plans with systematic follow-through.

Regarding education, African countries have a vision of an integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa driven by its own people to take its rightful place in the global community and the knowledge economy. That vision is predicated upon the development of Africa's human resources. Education is the major means by which Africa's citizenry will be prepared for its key role in the attainment of that vision.

It is well known that the completion of MDG 2 — achieving universal primary education — is fundamental to the success of other poverty-reduction strategies. The background papers for this meeting also provide statistics and analyses that are so telling. The United Nations report informs us that Africa is making progress towards universal primary school enrolment but still has a long way to go. It is sad that girls and children from poorer or rural families are least likely to attend school. Furthermore, disabled children still miss out disproportionately on receiving any kind of education. It is estimated that around 26 million of the 77 million children currently out of school are disabled and thus make up a third of all those out of school. Such a disappointing situation can no longer be tolerated.

African countries, for their part, have made massive progress in the past 40 years in reducing the illiteracy gap. An evaluation in the background papers shows that between 1999 and 2005 the number of children entering primary education grew by 4 per cent, from 130 million to 135 million, with a jump of 36 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. That is considered a major achievement.

In terms of net enrolment ratio (NER), sub-Saharan Africa registered a growth from 57 per cent to 70 per cent. That achievement is attributed to the focus of African Governments on the education sector and to support from cooperating partners. A challenge facing Africa is that more than one third of our countries have NER rates below 70 per cent.

Another great challenge is to ensure that children stay in school long enough to acquire basic competency. Comparatively, the median completion rate is lowest in Africa, standing at 63 per cent. A more holistic approach is needed to register genuine success on the MDG target on this front.

Africa realizes that education is essential for science learning, technology transfer and absorption, and capacity-building leading to increased self-reliance

in research and development. In that regard, the international community is called on to help realize this Goal.

HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria are still pervasive in Africa, and much has to be done in these areas if MDGs are to be achieved. Multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis has now become a serious concern. Although the infant mortality rate is going down due to public health interventions, Africa is fully concerned that the maternal mortality rate is still high, although there is an African Union road map for reducing it.

The well-being of children is at the heart of the MDGs, in particular MDGs 4 and 5. With this in mind, Africa has made children a priority. Over the years, the African heads of State and Government made a number of commitments to improve the well-being of the continent's children. They have also developed the Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Africa, through a participatory process involving all the regions.

Reducing the maternal mortality rate is likely to remain complex and challenging due to limited access to and availability of information, services and care, and skilled birth attendants, and the weak health systems lacking adequate human resources. In order to improve reproductive and maternal health, access to quality family planning and to a whole range of sexual and reproductive health care is needed.

It is pleasing to note that the World Health Organization is responding positively to the concerns about human resource challenges that were highlighted by health ministers from Africa and the rest of the developing world at successive sessions of the World Health Assembly. As Africa continues with the strengthening of the education and training of prospective health professionals, it is disturbing to note, however, that the brain drain to developed countries is still very high.

Since it is clear that Africa is not on track to achieve the MDGs, it is the continent's hope that global partnership can be strengthened in order to be back on the right path.

The Acting President: In view of the long list of speakers in this thematic debate and the fact that the Assembly will continue meeting today until 9 p.m. and then tomorrow morning and afternoon — but hopefully not in the evening — I would reiterate the President's

appeal to all speakers to limit their statements to a maximum of five minutes. Full texts of statements could, naturally, be distributed in the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We thank the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Srđjan Kerim, for convening this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for providing the background papers for the panel discussions on the first seven Goals.

Pakistan aligns itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda, Chair of the Group of 77 and China at the 88th meeting.

Although the first seven MDGs are of extreme importance to developing countries, their achievement and sustainability depends significantly on the achievement of MDG 8 — "Developing a global partnership for development". We feel that to truly assess our progress on the track to achieving the MDGs by 2015, all eight Goals should be wholly addressed and their achievement, or lack thereof, recognized.

The decisions of the 2005 United Nations summit encapsulated the agreed commitments of all Member States to development. Those commitments include not just the MDGs but also the other development goals, which were internationally agreed at the series of major international conferences and summits held over the last decade. They include the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, the Doha Conference on Trade, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and other, similar conferences. Additional and specific commitments were undertaken during the United Nations summit in 2005.

Again, while most developing countries have demonstrated a genuine dedication to implementing their part of those commitments by devising national development strategies, improving governance and creating a macroeconomic climate conducive to growth, trade and investment, the major developed countries, unfortunately, have not demonstrated a similar alacrity in implementing their part of the commitments in all areas of cooperation.

The available data indicate that at the halfway mark, the implementation of the MDGs is off track in many countries, especially in Africa. Half the world, nearly 3 billion people, live on less than \$2 a day.

For the majority of developing countries, concessional development financing remains an essential input for the realization of the MDGs and other international development goals. Several current negative trends in official development assistance (ODA) prove the disappointing levels of commitment from donor countries. ODA declined by 5 per cent in real terms between 2005 and 2006, and further declined in 2007.¹ Only five countries have met or exceeded the United Nations ODA target of 0.7 per cent. Current levels of ODA are 0.30 per cent among members of the Development Assistance Committee. ODA targets still rely heavily on debt cancellation and restructuring, which do not ensure a net financial inflow for development.

Multilateral and bilateral development assistance is, for the large part, not responsive to national policies and plans, since it is mostly earmarked to donor-determined sectors and projects. Currently, only 25 per cent of funding provided by the United Nations Development Programme is being spent on poverty reduction programmes. Such development financing is often accompanied by conditionalities tied to procurement from the donor country and/or expended largely on expensive consultants and experts from United Nations agencies or donor organizations.

In many cases, the net outflow of resources from developing to developed countries exceeds the level of development financing due to growing trade deficits, transfer of invisibles and capital flight. Also, the flow of foreign direct investment is mostly concentrated on a few dynamic emerging markets, while the majority of developing countries remain starved of private investment flows.

The effectiveness and quality of assistance are as vital as its quantity for the realization of the MDGs. We welcome the adoption of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and hope that it will be implemented by all donor countries. The most effective cooperation is that which responds to the national objectives, plans and priorities of the concerned developing country.

The need for the coordination, harmonization and coherence of aid policies and actions is all the more important now with the addition of new development actors and donors. Such coordination and coherence should be promoted at the country level by the Government of the partner country, as well as at the global level by the United Nations.

We have consistently underlined the need to develop and refine mechanisms to effectively monitor the progress of implementation of the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals. While some steps have been taken, including by developing countries, to improve MDG monitoring at the country level, there is an urgent need for comprehensive monitoring at the global level.

Such a specific monitoring mechanism will be an effective tool for the success of the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum that have been established under a revitalized Economic and Social Council. At its substantive session, the Annual Ministerial Review should review the status of implementation of various commitments and provide policy guidance on the operational steps required for their realization. We hope that the Development Cooperation Forum will receive and review the reports on the operational activities of all United Nations and other development agencies, including the Bretton Woods institutions. That mechanism should serve to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of international development cooperation and its responsiveness to national development plans and strategies. The Forum should also address issues relating to the quality and quantity of development assistance and aid effectiveness.

While there are fairly specific indicators to measure advancement in regard to the first seven MDGs, there has been no concerted effort to evolve such targets and benchmarks to measure the realization of MDG 8 and the other internationally agreed development goals. We propose that all relevant United Nations agencies and international financial institutions contribute to the elaboration of such specific time-bound targets and benchmarks to facilitate the monitoring of the implementation of the international partnership for development.

As the United Nations millennium report concludes, that international partnership should be based on three pillars: financing, trade and technology. We propose that the policy decisions and commitments undertaken in each of those areas be clearly reflected in a comprehensive matrix prepared by concerned United Nations agencies, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Thereafter, specific and appropriate benchmarks and targets could

be indicated and used to measure the implementation of specific goals and commitments.

Finally, even as we focus on the implementation of the MDGs and the other internationally agreed development goals, it is important not to lose sight of the major and multiple challenges that developing countries continue to confront in an increasingly globalized but unequal international economy — the inequitable trading system, rising food and energy prices, and the ongoing financial and credit crises in the largest industrial economies. Those new challenges pose imposing obstacles for the developing countries to realize the goals of sustainable development, including the MDGs. The United Nations and other international financial and economic institutions must address those central challenges if we are to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica): My delegation welcomes the opportunity to participate in this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as it offers us, the United Nations family, a unique opportunity to undertake a stock-taking exercise of the progress achieved so far and the steps to be taken to realize the full attainment of those goals.

Let me briefly note that Jamaica aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At the same time, we also welcome the statements delivered by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Prime Minister of Finland and the Foreign Minister of Mali, which underline the urgent action required by the global community to fully achieve the MDGs.

I believe that there is consensus in this Hall that the realization of the MDGs constitutes an integral part of the United Nations development agenda. We can also readily agree that the Millennium Development Goals are not a new agenda. The Goals have all, at various junctures during the life of this venerable Organization, been at the forefront of the United Nations development agenda dating back to the 1960s, when the General Assembly declared the first United Nations Development Decade. Every decade since then until the 1990s has been declared a United Nations Development Decade.

Despite the best efforts of the United Nations, the gap between developed and developing countries has widened, prospects for substantial social and economic

growth in developing countries have deteriorated, and their position in international trade has weakened considerably owing to major changes in global trading arrangements in an ever-evolving global economy, including globalization. The MDGs therefore form a critical component of the United Nations efforts to refocus global attention on the advancement of the development prospects of the world's poorest.

At the mid-point to the achievement of the MDGs, reports point to mixed progress among some regions in reaching some of the Goals. While there have undoubtedly been visible gains, significant challenges remain in their overall implementation.

The full and effective implementation of the MDGs by 2015 remains a national priority for the Government of Jamaica. Accordingly, the Goals have been incorporated at various levels into our national development strategies. We have recorded successes in many areas, including poverty eradication, primary school enrolment, life expectancy and the eradication of communicable diseases, including malaria. While Jamaica is on track to meet the Goals within the specified time frame, we continue to work with our partners towards building on that foundation.

In that context, while underscoring the primary responsibility of national Governments for their own development, my delegation is of the view that the success of developing countries hinges largely on assistance received from developed countries. Concomitantly, we need to achieve qualitative and meaningful progress in the collective efforts to develop a genuine — I repeat, genuine — global partnership for development.

Jamaica therefore encourages our developed partners to fulfil their long-standing commitments to achieve the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2015. Despite commitments made in Monterrey in 2002, pledges made by the G8 in 2005 to double aid to Africa by 2010 and by the European Union, also in 2005, to allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to ODA by 2015, we note with deep concern that ODA has effectively declined in the past three years. The Goals, while distinct, are intricately related; hence, achievement of one makes progress in other areas possible. The importance of MDG 8 — global partnership for development — must therefore be emphasized.

Myriad challenges impede the progress of developing countries in realizing the MDGs. I will highlight two which my delegation deems to be of crucial importance. During the recently concluded thematic debate on climate change, several delegations, including that of Jamaica, pointed to the causal link between climate change and the efforts of developing countries in their pursuit of sustainable development and the achievement of global development benchmarks, such as the MDGs. It is an open secret that, while industrialized nations are the primary contributors to climate change, the developing world continues to pay the price. Tackling climate change and the achievement of the MDGs can be construed no longer as separate agendas, but rather as two sides of the same coin. Efforts to address both should therefore be mutually reinforcing.

International trade, as we all agree, is an engine for development. In order for the developing world to maximize the benefits which can be accrued from participating in international trade, including poverty eradication and job and wealth creation, the global trade regime should be made more conducive to progress in all developing countries. In that regard, we observe with great concern the stalemate in the negotiations in the Doha Development Round since 2001. If our developed partners are truly committed to the development dimensions of the Doha Round, an early and successful conclusion of the negotiations is indeed vital.

My delegation is currently examining the recently released report of the Secretary-General concerning improving the delivery of the mandates of development-related activities, which outlines proposals to strengthen the United Nations capacity to deliver its mandates on development. We agree with the Secretary-General that a stronger United Nations needs a stronger development pillar. Therefore, efforts to address the lopsided and lacklustre approach to addressing activities pertaining to the three pillars are most welcome. However, that is just one of the many steps in the long journey that the United Nations will need to undertake to effectively bolster the development pillar.

In conclusion, the clock is ticking as we approach the 2015 benchmark. Additional decisive and concerted action is needed now if our goals are to be accomplished. We have a political moral and ethical

obligation to redouble our efforts; the future generations are relying on us.

Mr. Davide (Philippines): Due to time constraints, I will just read out some major portions of my prepared statement. Copies of the full text will be made available to all delegations.

The Philippines expresses its commendation and gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for convening this thematic debate. No one can dispute or doubt the wisdom of the choice of the topic and of the excellence with which it has been crafted.

As we come closer to the self-imposed target date on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this thematic debate is not only most relevant, appropriate and in order; it is also urgently necessary and critically important. At the heart of the MDGs are social justice and human rights. The Constitution of the Philippines expressly provides that Congress shall give highest priority to the enactment of measures that protect and enhance the right of all the people to human dignity; reduce social, economic and political inequalities; and remove cultural inequities by equitably diffusing wealth and political power for the common good.

The Philippines gives top priority to achieving the MDGs. The policies and strategies in its medium-term Philippine development plan 2004-2010 are designed to pursue and achieve the MDGs. Key players in the Philippines have performed significant roles to help realize the MDGs. The Department of Budget and Management has issued policy guidelines and procedures in the preparation of national and local budget proposals, emphasizing the importance of funding programmes, projects and activities in support of the MDGs. The House of Representatives of the Congress of the Philippines formulated a MDG legislative agenda prioritizing legislative measures attuned and responsive to early realization of the MDGs. The Department of Interior and Local Governments issued a guide to the local Government units in interpreting and incorporating the MDGs into their local development planning and budgeting.

Social Watch Philippines, a non-governmental organization (NGO), led the joint NGO-legislators alternative budget advocacy campaign that resulted in an increase of 22.7 billion Philippine pesos in additional proposals for MDG-related activities, and the approval of 5 billion pesos for the 2007 national budget. Another NGO, Philippine Business for Social

Progress, led the business sector in crafting the Philippines MDG Framework for Business Action. The Framework shows how the business sector can help attain the MDGs. As of 2007, a total of 159 companies supported the business and MDGs programme and had invested an estimated 200 million pesos.

Midway towards 2015, the Philippines has made considerable strides in meeting most of the MDGs. Using the tracking methodology, the Philippines is likely to meet the targets on poverty reduction, nutrition, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and access to safe drinking water. The correct policy, plans and programmes are in place to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and, given appropriate support from the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Philippines will be able, hopefully, to attain that MDG target.

One particular area of progress in the achievement of the MDGs is the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Constitution of the Philippines expressly provides that the State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men.

The Philippines has considerably improved its scores in the Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure, which could be the main reason why the World Economic Forum ranked the Philippines sixth in the Global Gender Gap Index, making it the only Asian country in the top 10 countries of the world where women are given their rightful place and role in society. This achievement also recognizes the legislative foundations for promoting gender equality, namely, Republic Act No. 9262, also known as the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, and Republic Act No. 9208, also known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.

Moreover, the Supreme Court of the Philippines has undertaken unprecedented moves to ensure that women participate directly in the judiciary's structures, processes and development programmes, projects and activities and benefit equally from them.

However, the Philippines has to accelerate efforts to meet the off-track MDG targets on access to primary education, reduction of the maternal mortality rate and access to reproductive health care.

As regards access to primary education, the Philippines has already laid the foundations for improvement through appropriate legislation. The school-building programme continues to be one of the Government's major priorities. The annual national budgets of the Philippines have consistently given the highest priority to education, as mandated by the Constitution, under which the State is directed to establish and maintain a system of free public education up to the high-school level.

However, the Philippines is faced with the problem of providing the huge amount of resources needed to construct classrooms, improve and print textbooks, and train and hire qualified teachers.

In addressing the targets under the fifth Millennium Development Goal — improving maternal health — the Philippines has to surmount an even greater obstacle. The current Philippine figures for the maternal mortality ratio and access to reproductive health services show that this MDG may be very difficult for the country to achieve by 2015. While Government policies and programmes are in place to solve this problem, an enormous amount of material resources are needed to achieve the targets.

These challenges are made more difficult by the fact that, in 2006, poverty in the country worsened, as the number of poor Filipinos increased, based on the latest poverty estimates.

Expenditures for social services as a percentage of the total budget in the Philippines have been declining in the past few years. Real capital spending on health, education, social security, welfare and employment and housing also went down. There is therefore a need to realign the national budget and place greater emphasis on social services, particularly on some off-track MDG targets. However, the external debt situation of the Philippines remains a major impediment to its efforts to reduce poverty.

The Philippines hereby reiterates its call to the United Nations — speaking now in a louder voice, with utmost seriousness and on a higher note of urgency — to consider the proposal for broader debt-for-equity arrangements to fund MDG-related programmes and projects. It calls on the United Nations to spearhead an international campaign to change the concept of debt sustainability from "capacity to pay" to "level of debt", thereby enabling developing countries like the Philippines to achieve the

MDGs without increasing debt and to finance the MDGs without being obstructed or hampered by debt service burdens.

The Philippines respectfully urges the United Nations to make social inclusion one of the guiding principles of the MDGs. The Millennium Declaration upholds the rights of children, women, migrants, migrant workers¹ and their families. However, vulnerable sectors of society such as indigenous peoples, conflict-affected communities, and persons with disabilities have yet to be taken on board.

There is also a need to push for more opportunities for inclusive growth that are available to more people, particularly the poor, since such growth is consistent with and supportive of the MDGs.

Finally, there is now more than ever a crying need for a number of reforms in the United Nations system, such as those on United Nations system-wide coherence, mandate review and revitalization of the General Assembly, *inter alia*. There is also an urgent need for all United Nations responses to climate change to be implemented. Needless to say, these reforms would certainly make the United Nations more effective and efficient in all its work, including, but not limited to, the pursuit of the MDGs, and encouraging Member States to do more.

As to climate change, we need not recount the enormity of its disastrous effects on development and security and on our work to achieve the MDGs. The plain and simple fact is that responding to climate change will require the use of funds and resources that could otherwise have been directly channelled to poverty alleviation, reduction or management, education, health, and so on, thereby effectively reducing the budgets for such purposes and delaying further the accomplishment of these MDG-related programmes.

United Nations reform, innovative solutions, bold strategies, especially with regard to climate change, and collective efforts and actions are unavoidable and compelling if the achievement of the MDGs is to become a reality for all. To achieve the MDGs, our commitment must be firm and unyielding, our pursuit relentless. There is no room for complacency. We must neither rest nor tire nor weaken.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): Uganda attaches great importance to the implementation of the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) and its follow-up mechanism. While we continue to invest a great deal of effort and resources to ensure success, we believe that attaining the goals requires coordinated action at both the national and the international level.

Uganda has streamlined all internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, into a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) which is designed to make their implementation effective and ensure the smooth flow of resources.

Like most developing countries, Uganda has faced great challenges in its efforts towards achieving the MDGs. But despite the challenges, some progress is being made, notably on the second, third, sixth and seventh Goals.

In 1997, Uganda embarked on a programme for universal primary education, effectively doubling primary school enrolment from 2.7 million to 6.5 million. Currently, enrolment has shot up to 7.6 million, of whom 50 per cent are girls. That is no mean achievement. The challenge that remains is to improve the quality of the education being provided, and I would mention here that Uganda has now embarked on a programme for universal secondary education.

Gender equality and empowerment of women is a cross-cutting issue in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, as are the environment and HIV/AIDS. Thus, the Government has mainstreamed gender issues in all its developmental and social agendas.

Key progress on gender equality includes revising the national gender policy and refocusing its objectives. Progress on gender disparity among primary school pupils is way above the Poverty Eradication Action Plan target of 65 per cent for 2003.

We have reduced the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS from approximately 20 per cent in 1996 to the current level of 6.4 per cent.

Progress on the seventh MDG with specific regard to ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation has led to access in 50 per cent and 60 per cent of rural and urban areas, respectively.

That is part of the good news, but the bad news is that Uganda is off track on the important Goals 4 and 5, which are unlikely to be met by 2015. While there is a downward trend in poverty from 56 per cent to 31 per cent now, a lot remains to be done. The decline in

poverty has been more pronounced in urban areas. Several factors account for the disparities in the incidence of poverty, including insecurity, climate variations, HIV/AIDS incidence, type of agricultural activity and the degree of access to infrastructure and social services.

My delegation would like to underscore the fact that getting back on track on those goals entails a doubling of our efforts, but more crucial is effective and timely international support in aid of our nationally owned strategies. Let me point out some of the factors that hinder our realization of the MDGs which have to be addressed.

First, more than 75 per cent of the population is dependent for its livelihood on agriculture, which is the backbone of the economy. The important link between agricultural productivity, development and the standard of living remains critical in reducing poverty. The restricted market for agricultural exports is frustrating progress in the modernization of agriculture. I also want to mention here that the recent food import surges as a result of liberalization policies have resulted in killing industries and creating unemployment in developing countries as a consequence of lowered tariffs. Something must be done to ensure food security and the livelihood of rural folk.

Secondly, heavy dependence on the exportation of primary commodities keeps growth in the economy volatile, as it is affected by changes in the international commodity market. To be competitive, we must add value to our primary produce and also ensure quality standards.

Thirdly, high dependence on oil as a source of energy means that the sustained high oil prices will continue to weaken progress towards the MDGs.

Fourthly, our economy is donor-dependent to a large extent, with a heavy external debt burden to bear. The declining level of official development assistance flows and donors' reluctance to fulfil their commitments are greatly frustrating progress towards the MDGs. Further aid utilization must be nationally determined and oriented towards budget support rather than project-focused.

Fifthly, there is the question of a fast-growing population, although in Uganda, we believe, we have not reached the optimal growth to achieve the desired economic development.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to reiterate the call made by the Group of 77 to our development partners to fulfil their commitments in areas that are critical, such as trade, aid, investment, including transfer of technology, and financing for development. The United Nations has a key role to play in promoting global partnership for development. Through its country-level operational activities, it should continue to help developing countries to build the necessary capacity for the achievement of the MDGs. For our part, we are ready to fulfil our side of the bargain.

Mr. Sen (India): I, too, thank President Kerim for organizing this thematic debate, while recognizing the achievements in focusing on the ways of addressing challenges so as to bring us back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

A very great heroic figure from Latin America, José Martí, summed up the MDGs in a single phrase. He said that all the world's glory can be fitted into a kernel of corn.

The MDGs are a quantifiable measure of human dignity. They are also an instrument for mobilizing international action. Here, I would say that MDG 8 is pivotal, though the focus of this debate on poverty and hunger, education and health is right in itself and certainly reinforces the MDG interlinkages. Efforts that we have noticed to redefine the MDG framework by selectively using commitments from the World Summit Outcome and to in fact dilute MDG 8 by transferring targets and indicators from MDG 8 to MDG 1 are a matter of concern.

Therefore, I hope that the Secretariat is aware that any attempt to proceed in that direction would actually undermine the legitimacy of the MDG framework itself. That is something that is ultimately also in the interests of the developed countries, because, to paraphrase Ruskin, the coloured tide that eddies at their doorstep is full of floating corpses, and if they wish to save them rather than to bury them, a meticulous and rapid implementation of MDG 8 is the path to an unencumbered shore.

The United Nations *Human Development Report 2003* suggested the solutions. The problem really is that those have not been adequately implemented. As far as my memory serves, the report says that we cannot halve poverty and hunger by 2015 without restructuring trade and agriculture. The fight against malaria and HIV will be lost unless there are affordable

medicines for the poor. Fiscal management and fiscal planning will be impossible without debt relief, according to the report.

And yet, we now have the same distance to travel to any of those ends that we had in 2003. The report also touches on technology for poverty reduction, public health and climate change, for which we now see the need. Indeed, in the case of all those issues, one cannot really make progress without addressing the intellectual property rights regime. Therefore, the United Nations will become progressively less relevant, in our view, unless it proceeds from words to action.

Of course, this is a good way of passing a warm afternoon, but nevertheless we have to see how the word can be made flesh, and that cannot be done without the United Nations using its massive and formidable convening power and harnessing it to the achievement of undoubtedly difficult action — for instance, a periodic audit of the International Monetary Fund; the establishment of a mechanism for debt relief, such as an international debt commission; or at least agreeing on some minimal exceptions to the intellectual property rights regime.

Economists have calculated that the protectionism of the developed actually costs the developing countries \$700 billion in export income, which is 14 times what they receive as official development assistance. Thus, it is not a question of a shortage of resources. It is really about having very little stomach for structural change. In fact, it is not even in the interests of the ordinary folk in the developed world either, because it has been estimated that the subsidies and protectionism of the European Union, for instance, cost the Union's consumers \$1 billion a day. Now, as Kishore Mahbubani has calculated in his latest book on Asia, Europe and economics, if we annualize that figure of \$1 billion a day — as we all know, the cows in the European Union get a subsidy of \$2 a day or thereabouts — there will be enough money for all the 60 million European cows to travel by business class around the world and also to be given \$3,000 for shopping duty-free during the stops. The MDGs can certainly mitigate current deprivation, but if they are to really create a more just world, then they have to be combined with the tackling of the institutional and economic causes of poverty.

I would strongly support what the Permanent Representative of the Philippines said on the question of social and economic rights that are inherent in the achievement of the MDGs. This is true, and I would go further and say that the MDGs have now virtually become international customary law. This is why the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has criticized the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers for emphasizing prioritization alone, rather than participation; in other words, the participation of the poor in poverty reduction and in all decisions that affect their lives. This is as important as the end result and is, in fact, essential to achieving the end result.

The poorest developing countries still remain caught in a raw-material/agricultural economy with minimal industry, as we can see when we glance at parts of sub-Saharan Africa and other regions. That is why, according to economists, they are offered debt relief rather than the eradication of the situation that creates debt and rather than the economic development which would make it possible for them to service their debt. That is why they are offered mosquito nets rather than the eradication of malaria.

The point is, as I said earlier, unless the United Nations tackles some of these issues with action, perhaps in lieu of having these thematic debates, because the question is not talking about MDG 8, it is rather a question of actually seeing through its implementation and monitoring this implementation and, in the Nietzschean phrase, having the "capital of spirit and will" to actually carry out structural change. Unless we do that and unless the United Nations goes beyond these afternoon thematic debates and goes into the realm of actually tackling these issues and taking action through structural change and institutional measures, these MDGs will, I am afraid, ultimately end up as some kind of permanent disaster relief or, as an economist has called it, some kind of welfare colonialism.

Therefore, it is important that we take account of these issues, not just here in the United Nations, but also in our multilateral and bilateral engagement with these countries that are the worst affected.

India has tried to keep this in view, in its interaction, for instance, with Africa. This is one of the reasons we emphasize items like the dedicated satellite and fibre-optic connectivity mission, the setting up of

information technology centres, the fact that Indian companies source their supplies locally, that they set up manufacturing plants, that they export capital goods which are then used by Africa for processing and for adding value to its own exports to the European and American markets.

We can only make poverty history, if, as the old saying goes, we understand the history of poverty. In the absence of an industrial policy of the kind I have just mentioned, we know what really happens. If you look, for instance, at the issue of debt: in 2003, 8 out of the 18 heavily indebted poor countries graduated and 4, or half of them, again relapsed. They relapsed because they reached 150 per cent of their gross domestic product in terms of their debt-service burden, which, according to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative definition itself is unsustainable.

In this context, it is also worth noting that in the last 26 years, that is, from 1980 to 2006, \$685 billion have flown out of Africa as debt service. It is striking to note that this is equal to the total debt of all developing countries at the beginning of this process, at the beginning of this crisis, in 1979.

And, again, if you annualize it, it has been calculated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that the annualization comes to \$25 billion. Half of this, according to the FAO, would be enough to completely eradicate hunger. So, again, it is not a question of a shortage of resources, it is a question of political will to tackle structural change and to address the real issues.

In India, we practise at home what we practise abroad. Therefore, the Government of India has abolished all debt carried by the small and marginal farmers of India. In other words, it has waived all loans that were made to these groups throughout India. Quite clearly, no MDG can be achieved with a rural debt overhang.

Similarly, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of India, which guarantees 100 days of paid employment to every rural household, really makes the right to work legally enforceable. It also ensures in its design that this provision is not a dole, nor is it the digging of Keynesian holes in the ground. It is truly public investment, as it creates durable rural assets. And what is more important — and this brings me back to what I said earlier about the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World

Bank — is that it is actually implemented by elected village councils, or Panchayats, as they are called. In this way, achievement of the MDGs is the result of popular movement in favour of the rural poor. That is why Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance, who called this a revolutionary measure, also laid the greatest emphasis on popular mobilization.

Therefore, the answer to the question in the very comprehensive economic paper circulated by the President is very clear, in our view: economic growth is not enough. Separate action is required on education and health, on hunger and poverty, on science and technology, free from external conditionalities or prescriptive advice.

Later, for those delegations that are interested, we will try to circulate a one-page statistical abstract on the physical and programme support measures that the Government in our country is taking in the necessary direction and in support of MDG-related activities.

For much is being done, including the midday meal programme, which now covers 129 million children and is arguably the greatest free lunch for children in the history of the world. Additionally, there is the electrification and the connecting telephonically of more than 25 villages annually, as well as the annual construction of 4,000 small rural houses. We shall try to circulate a short paper on this.

Therefore, I would conclude with what I have been saying in different ways, which is that without popular participation, it would be extremely difficult to achieve the MDGs. It is with this popular participation that we can achieve the MDGs, "rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days". That is a phrase used by Aimé Césaire, one of the greatest poets of the Caribbean. And with that, I conclude.

Ms. Lisson (Australia): I would like to thank the President for convening this meeting so that together we can take stock of our progress and galvanize our efforts to tackle the remaining obstacles to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals have become a unifying force for international action to halve extreme poverty. At the midpoint to our target date, we must take the opportunity to reflect on

how far we have come, what remains to be done, and how we can ensure that, in 2015, we are in a position to celebrate the successful achievement of these significant development goals.

In our 2007/08 financial year, Australia will provide an estimated A\$ 3.2 billion in aid — our largest ever investment in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development. We are working with developing countries, particularly in our region, to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Our Government is determined to increase the quantity and the quality of Australian official development assistance (ODA). We will continue to increase our overseas aid programme with the goal of providing 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015/16. We understand the challenges that face donors in such a major scaling-up. However, this is not an empty promise. The Australian Government has taken steps to ensure we can achieve this target. Funding has been set aside in Australia's budget to support an increase in ODA to about A\$ 4.3 billion in 2010/11, which is almost US\$ 4 billion, representing a doubling of ODA within four years. In practical terms, that will mean greater investments in aid in key MDG sectors — health, basic education, water and sanitation, the environment and climate change.

We are focused on building well-functioning education systems in order to achieve the second and third MDGs. Australia is working to build the capacity of our partner Governments' national education systems to enable more boys and girls to complete schooling and to improve the relevance and quality of education so that students can enter productive employment and contribute to the future development of their countries.

Health is another priority. We recognize that the maternal and child mortality goals are the furthest off track. And, in response, Australia supports development projects which deliver essential maternal and neonatal health services and strengthen health systems in countries with high mortality. We also note the findings of the Commission on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific last week, which indicated that we are not currently on track to reverse the spread of HIV. Australia has made a substantial contribution to global efforts to address this situation and to provide universal

access to HIV prevention, care and treatment, and we will continue to do so.

While education and health are crucial, we also cannot forget the need for environmental sustainability in pursuing the MDGs. Although there has been good progress on improving access to safe drinking water in many countries, progress on the sanitation target in the seventh MDG lags far behind. A priority for Australia is to improve water access and sanitation facilities across the Asia-Pacific region.

Climate change also poses a particular challenge to realizing the Goals. Having recently ratified the Kyoto Protocol, Australia is committed to assisting developing countries in our region to build resilience and adapt to climate change.

As we look towards 2015, we should be aware that the Millennium Development Goals will not be realized unless we move forward in alliance. Decisive action is needed from both developed and developing countries. Australia will be an active partner. We commend the MDG Call to Action launched in 2007 by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Honourable Gordon Brown, which has created a strong force of global action involving all stakeholders: Governments, the private sector, civil society and faith groups.

We also acknowledge the important role of the United Nations as our global partner in delivering development assistance and in supporting developing countries in implementing their national development plans.

Closer to home, Australia is firmly committed to working in partnership with our geographical neighbours to achieve the goals. Through the Port Moresby Declaration of 6 March 2008, the Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable Kevin Rudd, recently committed Australia to a new era of cooperation with Pacific island nations, based on mutual respect and mutual responsibility to work jointly to meet the Millennium Development Goals, to address our common challenges, and to raise the standard of living for people in the region.

Australia is committed to international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and we accept the internationally agreed aid volume target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for overseas development assistance.

Efforts to achieve the MDGs should remain central to the global development agenda, and our focus should be squarely on the delivery of concrete and tangible results. There must be a greater sense of urgency on the part of all of us — it is time to accelerate our efforts. Australia looks forward to engaging further in collective efforts to attain the Goals, including at the MDG Leaders Summit in September. We emphasize Australia's commitment to working in partnership with all Member States in the months and years ahead to make the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals a reality.

Mr. Mbuende (Namibia): My delegation profoundly thanks the President of the General Assembly for organizing this important and timely debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The debate affords us an opportunity to take stock of the successes we have achieved so far, the challenges we have met along the way, and to visualize the way forward as we forge ahead in our determination to achieve the MDGs by the target date we have set for ourselves.

We associate ourselves with the statements by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of African States.

Namibia has made significant progress in its efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015. We have met a significant number of the targets ahead of time. By the same token, meeting other targets remains a daunting task. Our efforts to meet the MDGs form an integral part of a national process of strengthening policies and mobilizing domestic and external resources towards our country's long-term development plan, "Vision 2030". National targets and indicators have been developed to ensure that the MDGs are firmly rooted in the successive five-year development plans and in the milestones of the long-term development vision.

Poverty in Namibia is defined in monetary terms based on household expenditure. It is measured by looking at the share of total household expenditure taken by food. If a high proportion of the household expenditure is devoted to food, then very little is left to satisfy other needs. Households are classified as relatively poor if 60 per cent or more of their total expenditure goes to food and extremely poor if the proportion is 80 per cent or more.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in Namibia has been a cardinal policy objective for my country over the years, and it remains one of the greatest challenges the country faces today. It is gratifying to note, however, that significant progress has been made on this goal. Targets are likely to be met by 2015, unless some of the gains are reversed by extreme weather conditions, such as the current floods that have caused untold devastation.

Our national household income and expenditure surveys for 1993 to 1994 and 2003 to 2004 show that relative poverty was reduced from 38 per cent in 1993 to 1994 to around 28 per cent in 2003 to 2004; while extreme poverty declined from around 9 per cent to around 4 per cent during the same period. There are, however, significant differences in the incidence of poverty between rural and urban areas, between regions and among population groups. Poverty in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, although urban poverty also poses a challenge to our Government.

We have also made steady progress in the provision of services. About 97 per cent of our population has access to clean water, and about 70 per cent of people in urban centres has access to electricity, while the Government's rural electrification programme has so far covered about 15 per cent of rural areas. I should, however, hasten to add that progress has been painfully slow with regard to access to sanitation, which stands at 61 per cent in urban centres and at 32 per cent in rural areas.

We are cognizant of the fact that an educated population is a prerequisite to development. To that end, the Government has consistently allocated the highest percentage of the national budget to the education sector. That has enabled us to make significant progress in terms of access to basic education.

Net enrolment rates for primary education were recorded at 92 per cent in 2005. Enrolment rates for girls in both primary and secondary schools are higher, than those for boys: 94 per cent and 56 per cent compared with 91 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively. Unfortunately, the majority of students do not make it to tertiary education due to a variety of factors. Moreover, we have a long way to go when it comes to adult literacy, where the rate has remained at 85 per cent since 1994.

Overall progress in reducing infant mortality rates per 1,000 live births has been slow. Currently they stand at 49 for males and 55 for females. Child immunization campaigns have yielded positive results with regard to diseases such as polio and measles, which have almost been eliminated in our country. There are, however, areas where a lot more needs to be done. The percentage of children under 5 who are wasted is currently estimated at 7.5 per cent, who are stunted at 29 per cent and who are underweight at 24 per cent. With regard to improving maternal health, there is progress regarding the proportion of births attended by trained personnel. However, maternal mortality is still high, at 449 per 100,000 live births, thereby impeding progress towards achieving that goal by 2015.

Progress in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases has also been slow, and, indeed, the situation may be worsening in some respects. The rate of prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high compared to 1992 but has stabilized since 2004. This is attributed to the incubation period of the disease. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the Namibian population, as measured through sentinel surveys, stands at 19 per cent, and the disease is still the number one cause of death in the country. However, through the launching of the third medium-term plan on HIV/AIDS — covering the five-year period from 2004 to 2009 — our Government and its development partners have put in place a broad national response to the pandemic. Indeed, current surveys have shown that there is a significant decline in the number of new infections.

Progress in combating malaria and tuberculosis has been modest. Malaria, which is the third main cause of death among adults in Namibia, is mainly being fought through the Government's free distribution of treated mosquito nets to families with young children and the spraying of houses in malaria-prone areas with DDT. The morbidity rate for malaria has been reduced, from 238 per 100,000 in 2000 to 140 per 100,000 in 2006. The tuberculosis treatment success rate has also improved, from 58 per cent in 1996 to 69 per cent in 2006.

My country faces a number of challenges that inhibit the early attainment of the MDGs. They include the following.

Harsh weather conditions as a result of climate change continue to constrain our progress towards

achieving the MDGs. Frequent droughts and floods have often led to crop failures and food insecurity. Resources earmarked for development are constantly being diverted to relief activities and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed infrastructure.

Increasing world oil prices and the accompanying inflation tend to result in rising prices for food and other basic commodities, making them unaffordable for the average household.

Another constraint is the volatility in international financial markets, combined with our inability to access financing on international capital markets on concessional terms because of our status as a middle-income country. Furthermore, the risks generally associated with small-market economies have also posed serious challenges to our development efforts.

The continuous decline in the levels of official development and technical assistance has negatively affected progress in capacity-building for service delivery.

The brain-drain phenomenon has led to the overburdening of the few personnel who remain in critical sectors such as health and education, to name but two.

To get back on track in order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 requires deliberate action to make the international environment conducive to development. The Doha trade negotiations need to produce positive results, with development as the central pillar. Our efforts to adapt to the effects of climate change need to be supported through financing and the transfer of technology.

It is indeed high time for the General Assembly to adopt a resolution mandating the United Nations system to address the development needs of middle-income developing countries in a comprehensive manner by, among other things, targeting those sectors that are critical to the attainment of the MDGs.

The need for coherence between the development activities of international economic and financial institutions, on the one hand, and the United Nations system, on the other, cannot be overemphasized. It therefore follows that the implementation of MDG 8 is crucial to the achievement of the other Goals. Development is a collective responsibility. All of us

should fulfil our commitments and meet our obligations.

Mrs. Vlotti (Brazil): Brazil welcomes this opportunity to take stock of the progress made in the timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to discuss our collective efforts to that effect.

It should be reiterated that the MDGs were not meant to replace the commitments undertaken by Member States at a series of United Nations conferences in the 1990s. The MDGs offer measurable benchmarks that help us to mobilize, guide and coordinate the national and international efforts necessary to honour those commitments. I believe that Ambassador Nirupam Sen of India reflected this thought very ably in his quotation of José Martí a few minutes ago.

Brazil has fully incorporated the MDGs into its national policies. We have actually established additional and more demanding goals. The results are encouraging. We have already achieved the target of halving the proportion of the population living on less than \$1 a day. Our current target is to reduce that proportion to one quarter. Likewise, we have achieved the target of halving the number of those suffering from hunger. Now our aim is to fully eradicate that scourge by 2015.

Educational indicators show continued progress towards both universal completion of basic schooling and greater gender equality. The participation of females in the educational system is already slightly higher than that of males.

As is widely known, progress has also been made in combating HIV/AIDS. In 1996, Brazil introduced its national programme for sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, which ensures universal access to antiretroviral treatment. The mortality rate associated with AIDS has decreased ever since, and the proportion of Brazilians infected with HIV has remained steady in recent years.

As we try to look into the future, we have reason to believe that Brazil will achieve all the MDGs by 2015. Poverty and extreme poverty are on a downward trend, and there has been a noticeable reduction in income inequality. Cash transfer programmes linked with social policy requirements, such as the Bolsa Família family stipend programme, and sustained

substantive raises in the minimum wage have played a key role in that process.

Brazil's actions have not been limited to its territory. We have also assisted other developing countries in their efforts to achieve the MDGs. We have done so either through direct financing and support to more than 200 technical cooperation projects or by making resources available to multilateral funds and programmes.

Along with other Governments, Brazil has set up the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID), which aims to facilitate access to drugs to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Just one year following its inception, UNITAID has already disbursed over \$250 million in 80 beneficiary countries. We are also active in the Multilateral Debt Reduction Initiative and the MDG Call to Action against Poverty. The latter initiative brings together Governments, companies and civil society in maintaining the political momentum necessary to achieve the MDGs.

Brazil fully acknowledges that each country must take the primary responsibility for its own development. However, no one can deny the effects of the international trade and financial systems on the ability of Governments — especially those of least developed countries — to promote national development.

With respect to trade, it is in our common interest that the Doha Round come to a successful and timely conclusion, thereby providing wider access to goods and services from developing countries. Since most of the poor in those countries live in rural areas, liberalizing the market for agricultural products is critical. It is also high time to eliminate the distortions in the production and trade of agricultural goods caused by scandalous levels of export subsidies and domestic support in much of the developed world.

With regard to international finance, bilateral and multilateral debt relief initiatives must be supported and, whenever possible, strengthened. The resources freed up by such initiatives will help poor indebted countries to face health and education challenges, thus improving prospects for the timely achievement of the MDGs. In addition, increased volumes of official development assistance (ODA) remain vital to development financing, especially for the poorest nations. In that connection, we recall that innovative

financial mechanisms are an important complement to ODA, but certainly not a substitute.

The current financial crisis could prove to be particularly perverse. Global financial turmoil is taking place precisely at a time when developing countries are reaping the economic and social benefits of decade-long efforts to eliminate sources of instability in their own economies. We must not allow hard-won gains in the developing world to be threatened by vulnerabilities generated at the very centre of the world economy. Such a scenario must be avoided if we want developing countries to continue to play a role in sustaining global economic growth.

Enhancing the coherence and governance of the international monetary, financial and trade systems and increasing the participation of developing countries in such systems will strengthen our ability to restore and maintain stability and growth.

The founders of the United Nations conceived it as a key instrument in ensuring peace and security after the catastrophic effects of the Second World War. They realized that such a goal required that all peoples should be provided with the necessary conditions for developing and improving their living standards.

The MDGs represent the most recent and important initiative of the United Nations to engage the entire membership in the fight for development. Brazil has high hopes that we will be able to surmount the many obstacles to attaining the MDGs and thus win that battle. We must not let pass this occasion to recommit to the formidable but clear objective we ourselves have set: sustainable development with equity for all.

The Acting President: We have just passed the two-hour mark in our debate and have heard only 11 speakers. If we continue to move at the current pace, I do believe that a night meeting will be necessary tomorrow, in addition to meetings on Friday morning and afternoon and possibly during the weekend as well. I doubt whether members would want that. Accordingly, I reiterate the appeal for everyone to speak no more than five minutes, and to distribute in the Hall extended versions of their statements, so that we can afford all speakers an opportunity to speak and can finish by midday tomorrow at the latest. Otherwise, we may be here for a very long time.

Mr. Penjo (Bhutan): In heeding your call, Sir, I will be very brief. I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the President's initiative and leadership in holding this important thematic debate.

We would like to associate ourselves with the statements made by the Chairs of the Group of 77 and China, the Group of Least Developed Countries and the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries.

In 2000, our leaders agreed on the Millennium Declaration, which outlined eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to benefit all people by reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of nearly one sixth of humankind by 2015. At the midpoint to the target date, many of those Goals are far from being met. That calls for urgent and concerted action by the international community, so as to be able to meet in their entirety the commitments made in the 2000 Declaration.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that Bhutan successfully held its first parliamentary elections last week. Almost 80 per cent of registered voters cast their ballots, bringing Bhutan into the fold of the democratic nations of the world. The formation of the new Parliament and the subsequent adoption of our first written Constitution will affirm Bhutan's transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Bhutan is fully committed to achieving the MDGs. The Royal Government has been making concerted efforts to alleviate poverty through improved access to roads, health, education, electricity and microfinancing services. Moreover, our tenth five-year plan, which begins this year, is primarily focused on poverty alleviation.

While we are on track to achieve most of the MDGs, there are a few goals that need immediate attention, such as achieving gender parity at the tertiary level of education, bringing down the rising rate of unemployment, particularly among young people, and reducing the risks of HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, the grave effects of climate change will make the task of meeting the MDGs more difficult. The irony of climate change is that its worst impacts will be on the developing world, particularly

small landlocked countries and island developing countries, which are least responsible for the problem.

In this regard, Bhutan has two major concerns about climate change. The first is its adverse impact on agriculture, which is the mainstay of 79 per cent of our population. The second is the threat of glacial lake outburst floods, known as GLOFs, which have severe consequences for our fertile agrarian land and human settlements. Furthermore, any instances of GLOFs could devastate our hydropower facilities and undermine the power sector, which remains Bhutan's largest source of revenue.

Urgent steps are needed to help the poorest countries adopt climate change strategies that reduce the vulnerability of their populations and improve their adaptive capacity.

We continue to face the demographic constraints of being a small population that subsists in a fragile ecosystem handicapped by the physical constraints of having a mountainous and landlocked country. The challenges are particularly acute for the delivery of social services, the improvement of agricultural productivity and the development of a dynamic private sector. Extensive capital investments in rural and urban infrastructure and intensive capacity-building at various levels are required to ensure a smooth transition to a self-reliant economy.

With the support of the United Nations, the Gross National Happiness Commission published the Bhutan Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment and Costing Report in 2007. This report gives a detailed assessment of the financial, human and institutional resources and policy reforms required by Bhutan for meeting the MDGs.

While Bhutan is on track to achieve the MDGs, scarcity of resources continues to stand in the way of the full realization of these goals. Bhutan will need to invest around \$2.5 billion between 2006 and 2015 to successfully implement the interventions identified by the thematic task forces for achieving the MDGs.

Bhutan's guiding philosophy remains Gross National Happiness, and all our development efforts will continue to be people-centred, including the fulfilment of our commitments in achieving the MDGs. As Bhutan takes its first steps in self-rule, it is extremely important that the first democratically elected Government succeed in all spheres of social,

political and economic life, thereby clearly signalling that the legacy of more than 100 years of peace and prosperity is now in good hands.

We thank our development partners for their invaluable assistance to Bhutan's development and have full confidence in their continued support at this important juncture in our history.

Mr. Bodini (San Marino): We commend President Kerim's initiative in convening this General Assembly debate on recognizing the achievements in and addressing the challenges as we journey towards fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Yesterday, a number of distinguished panellists confirmed that while several targets have been partially met, many others remain elusive, including poverty, hunger, health and education targets. Exploding population growth, armed conflict, massive migration, climate change and unrelenting diseases, as well as global financial and economic turmoil, are undermining attainment of the goals of developing and least developed countries.

As we were reminded by yesterday's panellists, the official development assistance (ODA) aggregate contribution is lagging to the tune of \$40 billion to \$50 billion. At the same time, we were told that several recipient countries have not perfected their national development policies and that more transparency and good governance are needed to optimize results and, what is more important, to attract larger public and private contributions.

San Marino believes that even small countries like ours can and must be part of the development process under the United Nations umbrella. The General Assembly is where all Member States can and must negotiate, establish, monitor and reassess from time to time the long-term development goals, taking into account evolving situations and changing factors in our very complicated world. We believe that this small step can have a major impact if we reaffirm our political commitment and if we engage at all levels, with the active participation of civil society and the private sector.

San Marino has been working towards the achievement of the MDGs and renews its full support for and commitment to the process. We would like to underline on this occasion our activities in the field of

gender equality, where we have engaged in a campaign to combat violence against women in the context of the Council of Europe. The results have been positive, and we plan to continue to develop our programme in line with the efforts of the Secretary-General's initiative in this field, an initiative that we fully support.

San Marino continues to be concerned about the situation of children worldwide. According to some forecasts, many developing countries will be able to reach the 2015 goal of reducing child mortality by two thirds, but unfortunately many more will not. We commend the work done thus far to stop the spread of tuberculosis, but we are aware that this disease, together with HIV/AIDS and malaria, is still among the major causes of mortality, especially in children and women. We should not forget that all three diseases are preventable and treatable.

In this regard, San Marino has contributed to the UNICEF programme aimed at preventing the HIV infection of African mothers and children. We believe that even small projects to solve specific needs can produce immediate, effective and lasting benefit. San Marino firmly believes that the United Nations system is very well placed to enable Member States like ours to become contributors to worthy causes.

In this context, our Government, in conjunction with the private sector, supports UNICEF programmes on youth activities in the field of social development and public awareness of children's rights. An educated and informed child will grow into a citizen able to contribute to a peace-driven, development-conducive and environment-friendly world.

Mrs. Aitlova (Kazakhstan): I would like first to thank President Kerim for having convened this thematic debate and to welcome his firm intention to move the process of implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) forward.

Kazakhstan fully maintains its commitments to the timely and effective achievement of the MDGs and other goals in the development field. According to the report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the status of implementation of the MDGs, Kazakhstan has already achieved the main targets of two MDGs, namely, ensuring universal primary education and the promotion of gender equality.

Nevertheless, despite these achievements, the country has set up new targets under these two goals

such as the improvement of the quality of education, the creation of equal opportunities for men and women, and the elimination of gender-based violence.

It is also reported that Kazakhstan will probably achieve the target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

During the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council in 2008, Kazakhstan will make a voluntary national presentation giving a full assessment of our progress towards achieving a number of MDGs related to primary education, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Recognizing that poverty is one of the most important challenges, the Government of Kazakhstan is making considerable efforts to develop and implement a poverty-reduction strategy that ensures growth in people's real income. We are also working to establish a viable social insurance system and to promote employment for socially vulnerable members of the population. As a result of those measures, the MDG of halving the proportion of poor people in Kazakhstan by 2015 will be achieved.

The 2005 report on the status of the MDGs in Kazakhstan indicates that three health-related MDGs — namely, Goals 4, 5 and 6 — are unlikely to be achieved without serious efforts aimed at the development of the health-care system, which deteriorated seriously during the transition period. To reverse negative trends in the health sector, the Government of Kazakhstan has appreciably increased financing for health-care services — up to 4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Particular attention is being paid to maternal and child health care, which is free of charge. Moreover, the reservations of experts with regard to the achievement of MDG 4 stemmed from a discrepancy in the definition of a live birth. Just two years ago, Kazakhstan accepted the World Health Organization's definitions of a live birth and a stillbirth.

The problem of ensuring environmental sustainability is of special concern to the Government of Kazakhstan. In order to ensure environmental sustainability, a national plan of action on environmental protection and the concept of ecological security has now been adopted to cover the period 2004 to 2015. Kazakhstan's new priorities in the area of environmental protection include the introduction of ecological standards in the economy, legislation and

the society at large. By 2024, Kazakhstan plans to cut carbon emissions per unit of GDP to about one third of their current level, as well as to increase energy from alternative sources by at least 250-fold.

Target 9 of MDG 7 is fully in line with the priorities of our national strategy entitled "Kazakhstan 2030". Because only 60 per cent of our population has access to safe water, the Government of Kazakhstan has developed a drinking water programme covering the period up to 2010. We have also allocated approximately \$1 billion in our budget to that end. The aim is to develop the public water supply system, including water management. As of today, almost 2,000 km of water pipeline has been built throughout the country.

It is widely acknowledged that, in order to achieve the MDGs, special efforts have to be made to ensure that landlocked countries like Kazakhstan will make the necessary progress under the MDG targets. The challenges and constraints faced by landlocked developing countries are enormous. Participants at the International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation and the sixty-third session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which took place in Almaty in 2003 and 2007, respectively, recognized that the high costs of trade transactions, influenced by the lack of access to the sea and remoteness from major markets, represent the main cause of the marginalization of landlocked developing countries. That situation is aggravated by the fact that most of those countries, including Kazakhstan, do not belong to the World Trade Organization and are isolated from main international trade flows.

It is therefore very important to ensure the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of major international conferences on trade and development, so that vulnerable economies finally get a chance to enjoy the benefits and advantages promised at the conferences. The upcoming October midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action is of crucial importance for landlocked developing countries in terms of reaffirming the commitments of the international community to address, in a timely and effective manner, the special needs of landlocked developing countries with regard to achieving the MDGs.

In conclusion, I would like once again to reiterate the commitment of Kazakhstan to its obligations

undertaken at the Millennium Summit and to the decisions of other international United Nations conferences and meetings.

Ms. Ghannam (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the President of the General Assembly for organizing this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which will no doubt help to raise awareness at the international level about the significance of the MDGs and the need to ensure their achievement by 2015.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the African Group.

Adopted in 2000 at the Millennium Summit by heads of State and Government, the MDGs have served as a catalyst in mobilizing all our strength and resources at the national and international levels to combat poverty throughout the world. Halfway to the target date set for the achievement of the MDGs, we can now take stock of the tangible progress that has been made in many parts of the world with the exception of Africa, which is not on track to achieve all the MDGs.

Despite their political resolve, their determination, the reforms made in economic and social policy and the promotion of good governance and the rule of law, the African countries have not been able to achieve a high enough level of sustainable economic growth to meet the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, despite the promises made and the commitment to increase assistance to developing countries, most donors have not met the goal of devoting 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance (ODA). The commitment to double assistance to Africa has not been honoured. Efforts to provide debt relief have benefited only a limited number of countries. The World Trade Organization (WTO) multilateral trade negotiations remain deadlocked, and the commitment made at Doha to place development at the centre of negotiations is far from being met.

As recognized in the Monterrey Consensus, while development remains a national responsibility, the contribution of developed countries is essential to give expression to the global partnership for development.

The achievement of Millennium Development Goals 1 to 7 depends upon Goal 8. In that regard, donors must implement the commitments made in the areas of ODA, debt relief, market access, technology transfers, capacity-building and technical and scientific assistance.

The United Nations and its various agencies and programmes have a role to play in promoting solidarity between North and South, thereby enabling the wealthy to come to the aid of the poor, so that the challenges posed by poverty worldwide are overcome. Experience has shown that poor countries cannot face those challenges without strengthened international cooperation and a conducive environment. Indeed, the progress achieved in certain countries proves that, through a combination of political will, appropriate strategies, sustainable financing mechanisms, an international environment conducive to development and international solidarity, we can give hope to poor populations lacking access to basic services, especially in the areas of health, education and access to drinking water and electricity.

Moreover, the contribution of South-South cooperation is significant. Current trends in trade and investment point to the role and impact of South-South cooperation on the mobilization of resources and the well-being of peoples. For its part, Morocco is actively involved in the promotion of regional and subregional integration, in particular within Africa, as reflected by the initiatives and partnerships that Morocco and its African partners have launched in various areas, such as health, housing, water, agriculture, services and training.

At the national level, through a policy geared towards the social sectors, Morocco is firmly committed to meeting the target date of 2015. Thus, the proportion of the State budget allocated to those sectors grew significantly from 39 per cent in 1993 to over 47 per cent in 2002 to 55 per cent in 2005. The launching of our national human development initiative in April 2005 further bolstered the policies and efforts of the State in the social sphere. The initiative seeks to reduce poverty and to place human development at the heart of the State's activities through a participative, transparent and democratic approach that involves citizens in the development of their community.

Our national assessment shows that Morocco is on track to meet the MDGs and that the efforts made to

date must be sustained if we are to do so. In that context, the national budget for 2008 seeks to give new impetus to the promotion of human development. The Government's activities will focus on accelerating the reform of the education and training sectors, promoting a social environment and employment, and increasing medical coverage and the number of public hospital structures in the various zones of the country, in particular in the rural areas, so as to reach vulnerable populations.

Three extremely important conferences will be convened this year. The high-level meeting on Africa's development needs, the high-level event on the MDGs to be convened by the Secretary-General, the Doha International Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development and other conferences will provide an opportunity strongly to promote international cooperation for the achievement of the MDGs.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius): Midway to the targets set for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we meet today to take stock of progress achieved so far. Unfortunately we observe that the record is quite dismal, to say the least. Based on the present trends, it is evident that we are definitely lagging behind and that there is very little chance that the set goals will be met.

Today's meeting is in fact of great significance as it provides us with an opportunity to explore the avenues still open to us to salvage the situation. I would therefore like to commend President Srgjan Kerim for convening this timely thematic debate on recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

While the overall picture of the developing countries may portray some positive gains and provide a cause for more optimism, the fact of the matter remains that a vast majority of countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are lagging well behind the targets. Poverty has continued to rise and is projected to reach the 360-million mark by 2015. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to ravage sub-Saharan Africa, with 1.7 million infected every year. Malaria and tuberculosis continue unabated in the same region. In that context, one is tempted to ask whether the bar set for the MDGs was unrealistic or whether we have done too little and moved too slowly.

There is no doubt that skyrocketing oil prices are creating real havoc in the economic growth of many countries around the world, and most particularly in the least developed countries and the small island developing States. The fuel bill is eating up so much of the national budgets of those poor countries that hardly anything is left for development purposes. Compounded with the high oil prices are the negative effects of climate change and global warming. We are witnessing floods and droughts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, of a scale and magnitude unheard of previously. Jointly, those two factors do not leave much scope for successful agricultural production or the much-anticipated green revolution essential to feed people. The situation is further aggravated for those who are net importers of food. When food security becomes a threat, development needs to take a back seat.

Thus, we find ourselves in a situation in which many developing countries, in spite of their tremendous and genuine efforts, are caught in an impasse. While many sub-Saharan African countries are struggling to meet their MDG targets, their raw materials and mineral resources are being exploited to the fullest extent at cheap prices for exportation by foreign mining and extracting companies to meet growing demands in the industrializing countries. Those companies are experiencing a business boom on an unprecedented scale. They are making substantial windfall gains. It is only fair that those companies recognize their corporate social responsibilities and contribute a specific percentage of the windfalls to the concerned raw-material-producing countries to help them achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Unless the international community honours the commitments and pledges made in the Millennium Declaration and at the 2002 Monterey Conference on Financing for Development, the 2005 World Summit — in particular the target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product in official development assistance agreed by developed countries in accordance with set timetables — and the Gleneagles G-8 commitment to double official development assistance to Africa by 2010, there are very faint chances that we can make significant progress towards the realization of the MDGs.

Furthermore, we hope that the Doha International Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development later this year and the United Nations high-level

meeting on Africa's development needs in September will not only help put the developing countries back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015, but will fast-track the commitments and pledges made at the international level to assist developing countries in their efforts to achieve the development goals. We also firmly believe that South-South cooperation can also play a pivotal role in spurring economic growth, promoting industrial development and helping in poverty reduction.

As far as my country is concerned, I should like to state that, in spite of its inherent constraints, lack of natural and mineral resources and distance from the lucrative markets of the world, we have achieved most of the MDGs and are on track to attaining the remaining ones on time. That is the result of a combination of factors, most important among which are enlightened leadership, political stability, social justice, democracy, accountability and transparency, and good governance. The separation of powers between the judiciary, the legislative and the executive, and respect for the rule of law and institutions have been the hallmarks of successive Governments since independence in 1968. An effective civil service, backed by a decent pay package, has performed remarkably well and has all along very diligently upheld the laws and regulations of the various branches of Government.

The private sector, which has been primarily engaged, over the course of two centuries, in the production and export of sugar cane, has taken full advantage of the incentives, facilities and infrastructure placed at their disposal by the Government. The partnership between the public and the private sectors has contributed significantly to the diversification of the economy in sectors such as tourism, textiles, manufacturing of apparel and garments — primarily for export — and banking and telecommunication services, to name but a few.

There has also been massive investment in education. As a matter of fact, only eight years after independence, education was made free at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This has contributed tremendously to human resources development and has been highly instrumental in the economic growth of the country. Since 2005, even transport facilities have been made available free of charge to all boys and girls attending school, college and university.

The maintenance of the welfare State is reflected in the availability of free health services, free education and social benefits, among other things. It is worth mentioning that the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Security and Women and Child Protection together account for about 36.5 per cent of the recurrent budget.

Mauritius today has a per capita income of almost \$6,000. While the Government is deploying all its efforts to raise the gross national income, it is also conscious of the fact that higher per capita income in and of itself will not mean much if the wealth is not fairly distributed. Not surprisingly, therefore, the present Government, led by The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, has made putting people first and the democratization of the economy its central objectives — and we are indeed witnessing the democratization of the economy.

At the regional level, the Government of Mauritius will be hosting the Southern African Development Community International Conference on Poverty and Development on 20 April. It is expected that the conference will, *inter alia*, adopt a regional poverty reduction framework with specific, measurable, attainable and time-bound targets with a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

Let me conclude by saying that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the set date would only be the first step towards sustainable economic growth. It is absolutely necessary that we succeed in this endeavour.

Mr. Frommelt (Liechtenstein): We thank the President of the General Assembly for his initiative to convene this important thematic debate, which deals with three core questions for development, that is, poverty, health and education. These issues cover the concerns of six out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, basically, concern all targets.

The seventh Millennium Development Goal (MDG), on environmental sustainability — not on today's agenda — should be taken into account when dealing with these fundamental issues. The linkages are obvious and therefore need not be underscored. Recently, the General Assembly devoted a special thematic debate to the sub-issue of climate change. Unfortunately, the latter thematic debate then failed to

address the interrelationships with these three fundamental questions.

The commitments undertaken as part of the Millennium Development Goals are, in practice, intrinsically enmeshed with other important commitments to which we all agreed. The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1) clearly states that multilateral solutions to problems in areas other than development need to be found. These areas are peace and collective security, human rights and the rule of law, as well as the strengthening of the United Nations.

For development to succeed in the medium to long term, good governance, in the broadest sense, is basically a *sine qua non*. It is for this reason that the Liechtenstein Government decided a few years ago to treat the promotion of good governance as a priority issue in its multilateral development cooperation.

Let me briefly turn to what my country is doing in concrete, practical terms, as we speak, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Government decided some years ago to consistently increase its official development assistance (ODA) towards the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI), as reaffirmed by the Monterrey Consensus. Liechtenstein is on track and will hopefully be able to reach an ODA of 0.6 per cent of GNI in 2008.

The three main issues of today's debate are incorporated in our new national law on humanitarian and development cooperation. The promotion of basic food and health supply as well as basic education and vocational training, in particular in rural and structurally weak regions, is the core of our bilateral development cooperation. With the new law, the various development actors in Liechtenstein are also in charge of public outreach. They are bound to regularly report about the focus areas, the organizations, the objectives and the impact of Liechtenstein's humanitarian and development cooperation. We regard it as essential to promote the Liechtenstein population's understanding of the causes of underdevelopment and poverty as well as possibilities for their alleviation.

Currently, the Liechtenstein Development Service organizes, for example, a series on "A Vision for Africa". Liechtenstein is also positioning itself as an active and competent agent in the field of microfinance. It launched the public-private

partnership Microfinance Initiative Liechtenstein in 2005. The Initiative promotes projects through which microfinance investment opportunities are created in the financial services sector.

Liechtenstein realizes that microfinance is one of the ways to contribute to development. Liechtenstein also sees microfinancing as an important contribution to fighting poverty, in particular by stimulating entrepreneurship in targeted developing countries. Liechtenstein shares the opinion of the United Nations publication *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2008* that "strong economic growth, while not the only condition, is essential to ... generating the necessary resources to achieve the Millennium Development Goals".

In many developing countries, stable economic growth has become a fact of life, so that these countries have consistently surpassed those in the developed world. The increasingly important role that some developing countries are now playing in the global economy goes hand in hand with new responsibilities. In a world that is often described as a global village, all national actors in the North and in the South need to pull their fair weight.

It is only natural that some developing countries should enhance their contribution to global development, particularly to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This aspect is important for getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015 in a more sustainable and effective way.

With regard to the Monterrey Consensus, the status of the implementation of its six leading actions is currently under review. Many activities and initiatives have been put into place, and positive effects on the consensus are palpable. The follow-up Conference in Doha will be another important milestone on our road to 2015. Millennium Development Goal 8, on global partnerships, intersects with the Monterrey Consensus, containing targets such as those related to aid, trade and debt relief. We are of the opinion that more can and must be done in these areas.

Let me assure the Assembly that Liechtenstein will continue to show international solidarity in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Ms. Ochir (Mongolia): My delegation commends the timely initiative of the President of the General

Assembly, Srgjan Kerim, and the strong leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in marshalling the efforts of the international community through stock-taking of the mid-point implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and identifying the way forward towards their achievement by 2015.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made earlier by the head of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the head of the delegation of Mali on behalf of the group of landlocked developing countries.

A clear message emerged from yesterday's discussions: commitments made under the global partnership for development ought to be honoured in good faith if we are serious about achieving the MDGs. The global partnership for development represents a global compact between developed and developing States.

Both sides need to live up to their commitments. While developing countries are making every effort to formulate and implement sound policies to ensure their sustainable development and to that end are mobilizing domestic resources, it is up to the developed countries to support such efforts through the provision of development financing, including official development assistance, in a timely and sufficient manner and by ensuring increased market access for developing countries. In this regard, the call for the formulation of clear benchmarks for MDG 8 ought to be urgently embraced. Furthermore, we wish to stress the importance of introducing innovative sources of financing.

In that regard, we welcome the proposal for an international programme of action for the period 2008 to 2015 to complement national efforts to achieve the MDGs with supportive global programmes, measures and policies aimed at expanding the development opportunities of developing countries. Indeed, focusing global efforts on individual MDG objectives each year could prove useful in getting back on track.

Mongolia stands committed to the implementation of its MDGs. Following the first national report on MDG implementation, the parliament of Mongolia adopted a resolution in April 2005 endorsing the national MDGs, tailored to addressing the country's specifics and its special needs. The parliament resolution entrusted the relevant State

entities with the implementation and monitoring of the MDGs and provided for the allocation of necessary resources in the annual State budget.

One particular feature of Mongolia's specific MDGs was the adoption of an additional, ninth, goal on promoting human rights, fostering democratic governance and fighting corruption. This was an innovative step reflecting the inseparable link among development, good governance, human rights and democracy.

Within the framework of working towards meeting that goal, the parliament passed a law against corruption, thus creating a legal environment in which to remove the shackles that this phenomenon imposes on development. In accordance with the new law, a new anti-corruption body was set up that deals with raising public awareness, the prevention and detection of corruption, investigation of corruption cases and auditing of financial and income declarations of public officials. Mongolia has also joined the United Nations Convention against Corruption and has recently expressed its interest in joining the pilot review programme countries.

Recently, the parliament considered the second national report on the implementation of the MDGs. The progress looks mixed: along with encouraging achievements, difficult challenges remain. Out of 22 Mongolia-specific MDG targets, almost 60 per cent have been achieved or are likely to be achieved by 2015. I am pleased to report that Mongolia succeeded in the early achievement of targets relating to such areas as the ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools, the percentage of children covered by measles immunization, and infant mortality and under-five mortality rates.

Nonetheless, the report also sends a warning signal that the achievement of other targets is slow or regressing. The most challenging among them relate to poverty-level incomes, tuberculosis, housing, the enhancement of gender equality at the political decision-making level, the female-to-male ratio of students in tertiary education, increasing the percentage of land area covered by forest and the net enrolment rate in primary education.

The report further concludes that among the reasons for slow achievement are an insufficient degree of mainstreaming of the MDGs in policies being pursued, weak coordination among Government

institutions and limited involvement of local government and civil society in policy implementation and monitoring.

With the support of the United Nations Development Programme, Mongolia has also conducted needs-assessment cost-analysis exercises which revealed that achievement of the MDGs will require \$14 billion. Mobilization of such resources would entail increased and focused support on the part of our development partners, since the total gross domestic product of Mongolia in 2007 stood at approximately \$3.2 billion.

Over recent years, Mongolia has been experiencing robust economic growth: an average of 9 per cent annually. Yet, translating rapid economic growth to significant poverty reduction remains a major challenge. To address this challenge, my Government has been undertaking a host of quick impact measures. These include a 420 per cent salary raise in the public sector, the provision of a monthly allowance to all children as well as one-time monetary support to newly married couples and new-born children and an increase in monthly allowances and pensions for mothers and the elderly. A free school meals programme for elementary schools has also been introduced.

Implementing all these quick-win initiatives is designed to enhance our efforts to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs. Furthermore, as a practical follow-up to the 2005 World Summit, our parliament adopted earlier this year a comprehensive national development strategy, based on the MDGs and developed at the initiative of the President of Mongolia. This is an MDGs-plus development strategy that, once implemented, will transform Mongolia into a middle-income country by 2021.

In addition to its national efforts towards achieving the MDGs, Mongolia endeavours to contribute to international and regional advancement, especially in the area of promoting the interests of landlocked developing countries in addressing climate change issues. Last year, Mongolia hosted a meeting of trade ministers of landlocked developing countries and a thematic meeting of landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours on trade and trade facilitation issues. These events set the priorities of the landlocked developing countries in the context of the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations and

contributed to the preparations of the upcoming mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action scheduled for early October this year. Mongolia is also proposing to host a North-East Asian summit on climate change early in 2009 as its contribution to MDG 7, on environmental sustainability at the subregional level.

In conclusion, may I join the call of the President of the General Assembly to make 2008 a year of action — action much more scaled up and reinvigorated — so that we will be able, by 2015, to fulfil our commitments on all the MDGs. Towards that end, we also support the President's proposal to annually organize a thematic debate on each and every individual MDG.

Mr. Muñoz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this important thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Chile aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group and by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In 2000, at the Millennium Summit, we committed ourselves to obtaining certain objectives and goals by 2015; we called them the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2005, Chile submitted its first report on the status of its implementation of the Goals and, this year, in the framework of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, my country will make a voluntary national presentation on our recent progress.

Chile has met most of the established Goals and will redouble its efforts to meet all of them as soon as possible. Moreover, we have set even more ambitious goals for ourselves, as we are confident that we will be able to meet them. We have considerably increased our social expenditures, gearing our efforts towards developing human capital and improving the quality of basic services, particularly in the areas of health and housing.

This Assembly has now reached the midpoint between the promises made at the start of this millennium and the target date for fulfilling those promises. However, the reports that we have received on the global status of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals raise concerns. True,

progress has been made in certain regions, but that progress is not sufficient. The Secretary-General himself has indicated that unless urgent and coordinated action is taken, many millions of human beings will be left with the promises made by their governors and leaders in 2000 unfulfilled.

It is not too late to achieve the Goals that we set for ourselves for 2015, but we must redouble our efforts and be efficient in taking specific and coordinated steps. We do not need new commitments; we must keep the promises that we made.

Among the commitments assumed by the most developed economies was the allocation of 0.7 per cent of gross national product to official development assistance. Once again, from this podium, we insist that the key to achieving progress for our peoples, especially the poorest, lies in fulfilling what has already been promised. We trust that all the developed economies will fulfil that commitment as soon as possible.

Furthermore, we must make it clear that in the fight against hunger and poverty and in achieving the MDGs, it is the States that hold the primary responsibility. It is the Member States themselves that must redouble their efforts, seeking mechanisms that will enhance the efficiency of their use of resources; implementing appropriate public policies to effectively combat hunger and poverty and raise the standards for education and health; and eliminating any vestige of the wasteful use of resources, inefficiency and corruption.

Chile is a middle-income country that has witnessed significant development over the past few decades. That has allowed us to contribute in solidarity with less-developed countries, thus significantly enhancing South-South and triangular cooperation. We are also of the view that the search for innovative mechanisms for development financing is an effective tool for our peoples.

My country and other nations of varying levels of economic development have united their efforts to combat poverty and hunger through the initiative against poverty and hunger, showing that differences in the level of development between various countries do not pose any obstacle and that it is possible to move from words to action in relatively few months.

That mechanism has resulted in the establishment of the International Drug Purchase Facility — UNITAID. Chile has already provided more than \$4 million, which is in keeping with the solidarity levy to which a number of countries have committed themselves and which in our country is equal to a levy of two dollars for every international flight that originates in our country. That contribution represents an unprecedented effort by Chile in the area of international assistance and cooperation. The money will mainly be used for the purchase of medication to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria to assist especially children, primarily in Africa. Initiatives like that can be coordinated on the global level. All that is required is political resolve and strong solidarity.

Chile is always available to exchange and share good practices and initiatives with other nations. We are always ready to learn from those who are more knowledgeable and to cooperate with them in the areas of education and health and in the fight against hunger and poverty. We believe that mechanisms for the exchange of experiences are financially efficient, as they also allow us to achieve results more rapidly and they send a clear and strong message of solidarity.

Mr. Mubarak (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by thanking the President of the General Assembly for holding this thematic debate, which will help increase international awareness of the commitments made in the area of development. I would also like to underline my country's support for the statements made by the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the African Group and, at the 88th meeting, by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Seven years have passed since the international community endorsed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Those Goals should be reached by 2015, and we are at the halfway point on that road. It is of great concern that many developing — and especially least developed countries have been unable to make headway towards realizing those Goals. Furthermore, it is unlikely that they will achieve any tangible progress, given the diverse problems and difficulties they must contend with.

There is no doubt that developing countries are required to put in place national development strategies and mobilize their domestic resources to meet the

targets set out within the framework of the MDGs. Although some countries have been able to make progress in that direction, many other countries, especially the least developed, still face various difficulties. They now face a growing gap between what is required and the capabilities that they have at their disposal. Despite their efforts, they do not have sufficient resources to implement their programmes to reduce poverty and hunger; combat increasing unemployment levels, increasing child and maternal mortality rates and the spread of deadly diseases, the most prominent being HIV/AIDS and malaria; confront the difficulty of achieving universal primary education; improve health and education services; and address challenges related to accessing energy and technology and capacity-building in various fields.

Acknowledgement by the international community of the right of peoples to development and the promises by partners to participate in the achievement of the MDGs have been insufficiently translated into concrete reality. Official development assistance (ODA) has decreased considerably. Many developed countries have not allocated the promised 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for ODA. Capital continues to flow from developing to developed countries. Income inequality between developing and developed countries continues to increase due to inequitable financial and trade systems that are skewed in favour of developed countries. Globalization has also exacerbated the marginalization of weak economies and exposed them to the risks of political and economic dependency.

The global partnership for development must be transformed into a tangible reality based on the commitments established in the Monterrey Consensus. In that regard, we stress the importance of increasing the levels and quality of ODA. Moreover, the international trade and financial system must be more focused on development.

The international community must demonstrate sincere political will to address special needs, in particular in Africa, without imposing impossible conditions. The international community must work with African countries to develop and implement development plans in various sectors. It must also work with African countries to create employment opportunities for the unemployed and must widen the scope of external debt relief. And it must promote

domestic and foreign investment in infrastructure and various areas of production.

Middle-income countries, especially those that rely on a single commodity for their income — which are consequently more at risk from price instability and economic crises, but for whom the Millennium Development Goals are nevertheless within reach — require sustained support for their development efforts. They should be encouraged to establish new mechanisms to underpin economic development, increase the effectiveness of social spending and improve health and education services. Middle-income countries must also be empowered so that they have access to development and capacity-building technology and expertise.

As far as Libya is concerned, studies undertaken to assess living standards reveal that there are no members of society for whom the terms “poor” or “hungry” are applicable. That is because Libya has adopted policies to subsidize basic food staples, therefore providing them at a price affordable to those on limited income. Addressing the needs of that segment of society is a strategic development priority in Libya.

The number of health clinics and educational institutions is constantly on the rise, as are efforts to improve the services they provide, which are free of charge. For example, the percentage of children under 15 years of age enrolled in primary and secondary education has increased to more than 98.5. Hospitals and health centres, which provide services free of charge, are being established in every part of the country.

Meanwhile, the restructuring of many sectors of the economy, along with the adoption of a new legal framework, has boosted economic performance. In addition, we are encouraging the establishment of shareholding companies and expanding the scope of economic activity and the provision of loans on favourable terms in order to accelerate economic development and provide employment opportunities to those who are in need.

Libya is eager to be a supportive partner to the least developed countries as they endeavour to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially as

regards combating poverty and diseases. Libya has established the Qadhafi Strategic Project for Children, Young People and Women in Africa, which aims at helping to eliminate poverty, ignorance and disease in the continent and to alleviate the suffering of those sectors of society. We would like to emphasize the importance of providing support for the project so that it can achieve its ambitious goals more quickly.

In cooperation with Nigeria and Cuba, Libya is also implementing a South-South health-care project that provides a range of health services to those in need in a number of African countries.

Based on our belief in the policies of the African Union aimed at achieving economic integration between the countries of the continent, Libya is working to invest jointly with many African countries — especially sub-Saharan countries — in order to implement various agricultural projects. To that end, we have organized several meetings attended by African officials with expertise in that field. As a result, important outcomes and recommendations have been achieved that will help us to overcome many difficulties.

Libya is also playing a major role in the establishment and funding of financial institutions to bring together the countries of the Sahel and the Sahara in order to raise loans and fund manufacturing and service projects in many of the member States of those areas. We are also working to encourage Libyan investors to increase their production investment in the countries of Africa.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the Millennium Development Goals — which have become a worldwide framework for development and a road to prosperity and stability for the peoples of the world and to the creation of a better world for all — will not be achieved without concerted international efforts and a commitment by all to stand by the promises they have made.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for the thematic debate for this meeting. We will continue with the next plenary meeting immediately.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.